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Enviroscapes boosted its profitability by firing 70 percent of its clients.

2012 Leadership Awards pg. 51 Legal mistakes to avoid pg. 70 5 ways to destroy a company pg. 136

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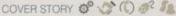
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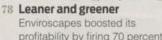
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profitability by firing 70 percent of its clients, and focusing on the important ones.

In every issue

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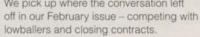
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Phil Allen inspires tomorrow's leaders to raise the bar for the industry.

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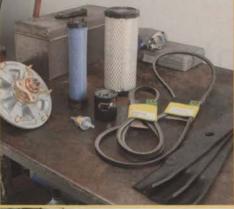
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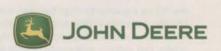
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ONLINE Contents

Check out what's now online from Lawn & Landscape

News with tunes

L&L's parent company, GIE Media, has a new horticulture news app that was recently approved by iTunes. The app will channel breaking news, industry updates and great new feature stories. It will also feature the latest products and the hottest videos from our market and all of the other ornamental and turf markets we serve. If you have an iPhone or iPad and you want to stay connected, download it now by visiting bit.ly/hortnewsapp. Look for the Droid version soon.





Propane made easier

If you're interested in switching to propane, or already have, here is something to make the transition a little simpler. The Propane Education & Research Council has put together a guide that lists propane-fueled mower manufacturers and their 2012 models, including: mower model name, mower type, deck sizes and engine model. Visit www.lawnandlandscape.com and search "walk-behind mowers" to find this information.

From the archives

While the economy has changed from five years ago, basic business lessons haven't. And our March 2007 cover story, which featured Jonathan Tucker and Matt Hubbard of Team Turf Landscape, highlighted an important lesson. The duo started mowing lawns when they were



nine years of age, and when they officially started the business in 1996 in their 30s, they had some of the same customers they had as kids. The pair stressed customer attention as a priority, and that type of a thought process led them to new customers. They didn't even budget for marketing because their referral program worked so well ... a little too well. "Some clients really take advantage of this program and end up earning a half-year of maintenance for free," Tucker says in the article. "We may end up operating at a loss for that one client, but it's worth it because we make it up in new clients." Visit www.lawnandlandscape.com and click on our current issue tab on the left side of the page to find this article, and more back issues.

On the road, again

We're only a quarter through the year, but we've already been to Atlanta, the Bahamas, Los Angeles, Chicago and cities in Ohio and Florida. Throughout our travels we shot video asking contractors and industry suppliers what is happening in their markets. Type in the links below to access a few of the videos, and visit our multimedia page at bit.ly/llmultimedia to see all of the videos.

High-end out West

Steve Jacobs of Nature Designs talks at LIS about working with high-end clients and the state of the industry in California. bit.ly/highendclients



Now hiring

Daniel McClure from LKM Mowing & Landscaping spoke with us at Mid-Am in Chicago about his company's growth. bit.ly/mcclurelkm



New year, new show

Kevin Thompson outlines changes to CENTS for 2012, and gives an update on the Ohio market. bit.ly/cents2012



POPULAR POSTS

facebook.

twitter

Here are some links our followers and friends found the most intriguing across our social media platforms.

SICK-TIME RULES REVISITED

More governments look to require small businesses to provide time-off benefits for worker illnesses.

bit.ly/sicktimerules

A NUMBERS GAME

This Indiana contractor doubled down on design/ build and came out on top. bit.ly/anumbersgame

NEW LANDSCAPE LIGHTING WEBINAR SERIES ANNOUNCED

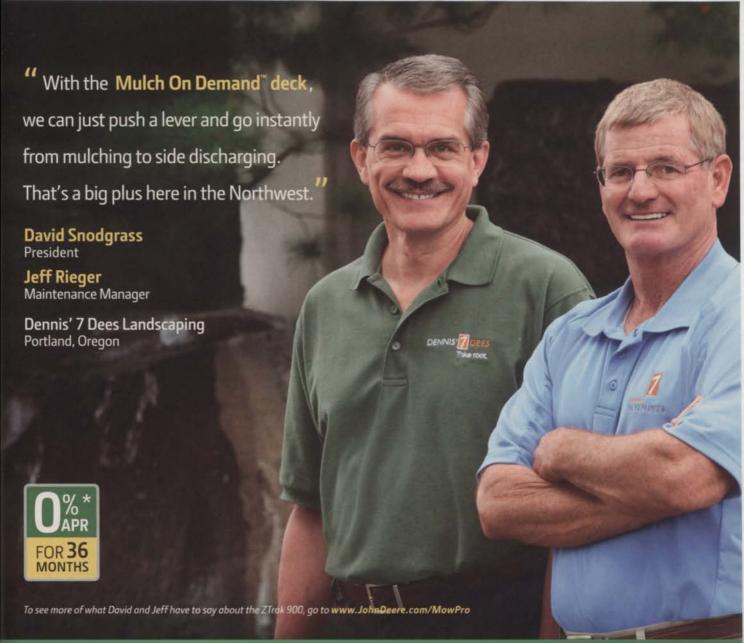
Learn more about this growing and profitable segment with four webinars from Kichler Lighting and Lawn & Landscape. bit.ly/lightwebinar

TORO CATALOG FEATURES NEW PRODUCT LINE

The 2012 Commercial Landscape Equipment Lineup Catalog highlights the new Z Master Commercial 2000 Series mowers. bit.ly/torocatalog

NO SNOW DAYS

Landscaping businesses are hurting because of the snowless season. bit.ly/nosnowdays

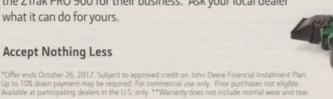


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There's an app for that

ast year, I spent about 75 days on the road. That's about a week each month traveling to trade shows, conferences, contractor offices and manufacturer events. My editors were gone for another 25 each.

Apart from racking up frequent flier miles and learning a lot more than we ever wanted to about the surreal nature of pre-packaged sandwiches sold in air-

port kiosks, all this travel helps me and my team do one thing very well: understand the landscape industry, identify our readers' problems and figure out what they need from a publication like Lawn & Landscape.

Having great reporters and editors with boots on the ground across the country helps us bring original and independent stories from the industry at large to each of our readers in many ways. And while we cover events like the GIE+EXPO and Next Level University on Twitter, our website and then, later, in the print edition, each medium is limited in its reach and scope. Tweets tend to disappear fast and the printed magazine comes out too long after the events to have any immediate impact.

But now, thanks to our talented team of developers and designers, we've got an even better way for you to get the latest, most up-to-the-minute news, product announcements and multimedia from us.

This month, in partnership with our sister publications in the nursery,





greenhouse, garden center and golf course industries, we've launched the GIE Media Horticulture News app. It's a clearinghouse for breaking news, industry updates, feature stories, the latest products and videos from our crack team of editors on the five markets we serve

So now, you have access to breaking business news in the landscape industry, updates on tree and shrub diseases from our nursery team, turf science updates from the golf editors, retail insight from our garden center editors and seasonal color insight from the greenhouse group - all in one place, updated 24/7 and right at your fingertips.

The first phase of the app launch works on iPhones and iPads, and we'll expand its functionality to work on Android devices later this year.

It's the next iteration of innovation from GIE Media - you do already have the Lawn & Landscape app, right? Download it for free on iTunes or your Android Market. You'll be glad you did.- Chuck Bowen

bit.ly/hortnewsapp

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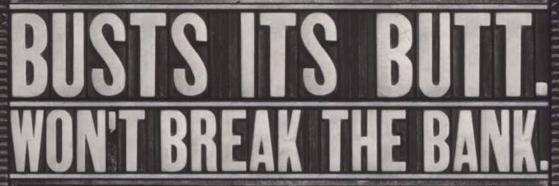
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National Arboretum planning turf exhibit

WASHINGTON - The green industry plays a key role in educating the public on the importance of turfgrass. And soon there could be a large tool to help with that effort.

The U.S. National Arboretum hopes to install an exhibit that will inform the public and policymakers of the positive impact of turf in home landscapes and the communities. The idea is to explain what turf is, its benefits, ongoing research and the value the industry has on the economy.

While plans are still tentative, a group of green industry professionals is being developed to help in the coordination of the exhibit and fundraising is getting underway, said Kevin Morris, executive director of National Turfgrass Evaluation Program and the person the arboretum originally approached with the idea.



Depending on the amount of in kind products and services donated, the design, installation and maintenance of the project for three years will cost between \$100,000 and \$250,000, Morris said. Though he thinks it will be more on the high end.

The tentative plan is for the exhibit to open in spring 2013 and continue through 2016 or 2017. The site is about 1.5 acres and promi-

nently displaced across from the National Arboretum's administrative building. About 500,000 people visit the arboretum each year. - Carolyn LaWell

ONLINE NEWS

For more news and weekday updates, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com.

Green industry radio show launched

Chris Heiler developed the show to discuss the latest technology and social media news.

Agrium reports record fourth quarter and annual results

The company generated more than \$1 billion in cash this quarter.

U.S. lawns had record year in 2011

The company added 24 franchises, marking another year of double-digit expansion.

Ariens introduces rental program

The program includes a full line of products and related accessories for snow removal, mowing, chore and debris handling.

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The Greenery makes acquisition

BEAUFORT, S.C. – The Greenery purchased the assets of Mazzanna's Lawn & Landscaping of Beaufort, S.C., expanding its reach in the Lowcountry.

The Greenery now has locations in Beaufort, Hilton Head, S.C.; Charleston, S.C.; and Savannah, Ga. It was ranked No. 42



on Lawn & Landscape's 2011 Top 100 list with \$25.1 million in 2010 revenue.

Mazzanaa's is a \$3 million landscape maintenance and construction company that performs commercial, residential and military contract work. Gary Mazzanna and his staff continue serving their clients, but are doing so as employee owners of The Greenery.

In a letter to Mazzanna's clients, Lee Edwards, CEO of The Greenery, said, "We are ... certain that we will continue the same quality of service that Mazzanna's Lawn & Landscape has practiced and will continue to improve and enhance the quality of your landscape.

Mazzanna will work closely with Jerry Ashmore, a branch manager with

M&A update

Multiple acquisitions have taken place this year. Here are a few more.

Bartlett Tree Experts bought Tree Medics located in New Orleans. In late 2011, Bartlett made acquisitions allowing it to expand its locations in Hartford, Conn., and State College, Pa., and it grew internationally with an acquisition of Writtle Park Ltd., in London and East Anglia, Great Britain.

Lawn Dawg acquired Lush Lawn Service in Plainville, Conn., continuing its growth on the East Coast. Five weeks earlier, the New Hampshire company acquired Capital Green Lawn Care in Rochester, N.Y.

Virginia Green Lawn Care, a Richmond, Va.-based company, acquired local company, Beaver Tree and Lawn Service. The merger allows Virginia Green to boost its number of employees to 35 and its number of customers to nearly 8,500.

Connecticut Homescapes and READCO Landscaping have both joined The Yard Group's family of companies. The Yard Group, a Connecticut company, now has four companies in the state in its portfolio.

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Manitou and Yanmar create alliance

WEST BEND, Wis., ADAIRSVILLE, Ga. - Manitou Group and Yanmar Co. has formed a strategic alliance to launch a new line of equipment.

The two companies have had a long-standing partnership including the use of Yanmar engines in Gehl and Mustang branded compact equipment manufactured by Manitou in the United States, the companies said in a statement.

Initially as part of the alliance, Manitou will launch a line of compact excavators manufactured by Yanmar, under the Gehl and Mustang brands for the North American sales region. With this announcement, Manitou has concluded its distribution relationship with Wacker Neuson who has provided compact excavators and allwheel steer loaders to Manitou for the Americas region since 1999.

In parallel, Yanmar will launch a range of skid loaders and compact track loaders designed and manufactured in the United States by Manitou's Compact Equipment Division under the Yanmar brand for distribution in North America.

After the completion of the initial launch by both companies, they will look at broader distribution opportunities aimed at growing sales activities for both companies while strengthening each company's independent dealer network, the statement said.

Further opportunities for manufacturing alliances will also be explored to shorten time to market and better utilize existing worldwide manufacturing facilities and expertise, the companies said.

"There is a strong synergy between our organizations, from our core culture and values to the complimentary fit of our product lines," said Ted Bregar, president of Yanmar America.

"We believe the market will readily embrace the quality and value that our products have to offer."

Industry veteran makes a change

ARVADA, Co. - After 35 years in the green industry, Tom Fochtman has launched a new endeavor. The new company, Ceibass Venture Partners, will work with green industry business owners to prepare their companies to be in the best possible position for a profitable equity event.

He is not exploring mergers and acquisitions, but simply helping business owners prepare for transfer or sale, whether it is next year or in five years. With few exceptions, no one is ready to have conversations about exit strategies until it is too late, Fochtman says.



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Boxwood blight found in Connecticut

Connecticut plant regulators are recommending that those who receive shipment of boxwood plants this spring monitor them for boxwood blight.

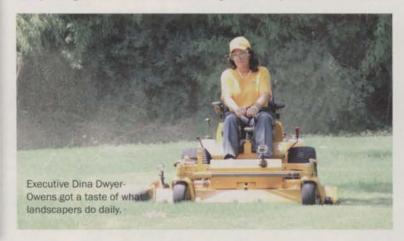
Shipments should be isolated for about three weeks to observe the plants for any sign of the new fungus. Scientists lack a reliable test to determine if asymptomatic plants harbor the fungus. This puts all plant regulators – including those at the Connecticut Agricultural Experiment Station – in a tough position because of the risk in certifying a boxwood crop "clean" when in fact it may show infection later on, said the Connecticut Nursery & Landscape Association. Station inspectors will instead use the term "apparently free of disease."

The fungal spores can survive five years or more and can spread rapidly in warm, humid conditions. North Carolina and Virginia have also found Boxwood blight, according to the Station. More information can be found at 1.usa.gov/compboxwood.

The Dwyer Group CEO uncovers values in action

WACO, TEXAS – Dina Dwyer-Owens champions her company's core values: respect, integrity, customer focus and having fun in the process. To see if those values were really being lived within The Dw-

yer Group's family of companies, including The Grounds Guys, she stealthily went into the businesses as part of the TV series Undercover Boss. Lawn & Landscape caught up with Dwyer to ask about the







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Dwyer-Owens said she had a lot of fun working for The Grounds Guys.

experience. You can read more about what she learned and how The Grounds Guys reaffirms its code of values on our blog www.blog.lawnandlandscape.com.

Why did you decide to go on Undercover Boss?

I decided to go on Undercover Boss because it gave me an opportunity to fulfill a lifelong desire to see how my company's code of values was taking hold across our franchise family. I wanted to see if we were truly putting the customer's first.

What was the experience like working with The Grounds Guys?

Working with The Grounds Guys was one of the most fun experiences of all. I had never operated equipment quite like that before and I was a little nervous and thankful for Jake's patience. It was extremely hot that day and it took me several tries to finally get the hang out of it all. Working in the flowerbeds truly gave me a worm's eye view of what it takes to be on the frontline.

Why was it such an emotional experience for you?

I had the honor to meet some really tremendous frontline servicemen and woman. To see their dedication to not only their jobs and customers, but to their families was a wonderful experience for me. With The Grounds Guys, Jake was overcoming an emotional time in his life, with the passing of his father, and to see how he continues in his father's footsteps, quite like I did after my father's passing, was very powerful and inspiring. I can truly see

how our code of values was being lived throughout their entire lives and not just on the job.

How will the experience help the company in the future?

This experience gave us an opportunity to take a harder look at ourselves, our businesses, our customers and all the opportunities we have each and every day to make a difference, and not only create a better experience for our customers but for our franchisee employees as well. I now have on a different set of eyeglasses.

Two new herbicides introduced

Dow AgroSciences and Untied Turf Alliance both recently released new herbicides for the lawn care market.

Dow's Kerb SC T&O is a new formulation that uses pints per acre rather than pounds, making it easier for LCOs to

match rates to the treatment area, the company said.

Kerb SCT&0

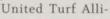
"The suspendable

concentrate formulation has been a standard in key markets," says Andy Kaler, product manager with Dow AgroSciences. "We have combined the performance you know from Kerb with a more user-friendly formulation."

Kerb SC T&O provides both preemergence and early postemergence control of many winter annual and perennial grasses, including annual bluegrass (Poa annua) from warm-season grasses and the removal of perennial ryegrass from warm-season grasses during spring transition, the company says. The new product replaces Kerb 50WP specialty herbicide, and is now

available in most states.

The new liquid formulation also is easier on equipment and reduces worker exposure, the company says.





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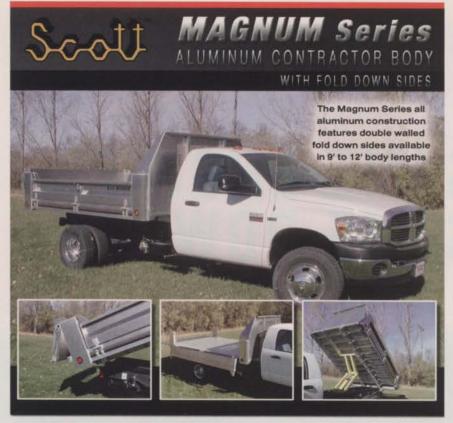
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NEWS

ance also introduced a new herbicide: ArmorTech SureZone Turf Herbicide. The herbicide contains four active ingredients, including the protox inhibitor sulfentrazone. The other active ingredients in the new herbicide are 2,4-D, MCPP and dicamba.

"The sulfentrazone in SureZone herbicide is noteworthy because it causes weed cells to rupture and provides that quick visual response everybody is looking for," United Turf Alliance President Tim Zech said. "As a fourth active, it takes SureZone beyond the traditional three-ingredient herbicide realm and also gives applicators more flexibility for controlling weeds in cool weather."

SureZone is a water-based formulation packaged in 2 x 2.5-gallon cases and 55-gallon drums. Labeled for use on most cool- and warm-season turfgrasses, with the exception of St. Augustine, it controls a long list of broadleaf weeds including many tough species. SureZone can be applied at temperatures up to 90°F, is rainfast within six hours and allows reseeding in three weeks.

Company fined for disposing chemicals in stream



PITTSBURGH – EG Systems of Marysville, Ohio, was fined \$160,000 in connection with an employee's deliberate disposal of an herbicide-pesticide-fertilizer mixture into a small Allegheny County stream.

The fine came from the Pennsylvania Department of Environmental Protection. EG Systems does business in the Pittsburgh area as Scotts Lawn Service.

"The results in this case serve notice that DEP will work diligently and tirelessly to protect our streams and waterways," said DEP Southwest Regional Director Susan Malone.

In June 2010, DEP investigators discovered an EG Systems employee

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at the Scotts Lawn Service location in Monroeville had built a siphon system connecting an 8,000-gallon holding tank to a gutter downspout drain. The drain empties directly into a storm sewer, which discharges into an unnamed tributary that flows into Thompson Run.

The employee used the siphon to drain five gallons of a mixture of herbicide, pesticide, fertilizer and water into the drain, in order to test how long it would take to drain a known volume of the material. Neighbors noticed a strong odor coming from the storm sewer, but officials could not pinpoint the source because the discharge was relatively small.

The next day, the employee used the siphon to discharge between 800 and 1,000 gallons of the mixture into the drain. Neighbors again complained about the odor and contacted local police and fire officials. This time, officials found the source and contacted DEP. which notified EG Systems. The company promptly hired an environmental remediation contractor to handle the cleanup.

DEP's investigation uncovered the employee's arrangement and resulted in eight violations of the state's Solid Waste Management Act and the Pennsylvania Clean Streams Law. The agency and the company entered into a Consent Assessment of Civil Penalty. The \$160,000 penalty DEP collected goes into the Clean Water Fund, which is used to address pollution issues.

In a separate action, the Pennsylvania Office of Attorney General reached a settlement on criminal charges against the employee. He must serve two years probation, pay a \$2,500 fine and perform 40 hours of community



Benchmark Landscape has hired Andrew Cason and Cody Hutcherson to its team. Cason has been hired as a business developer in the company's commercial maintenance division and will focus on customer relations. Hutcherson was also hired to the business development team and will work on sales.

EDI Landscaping has named Joan Murdoch-Davidson as partner of the firm, Davidson will oversee the company's business development, as Davidson well as the financial and administrative aspects of the business. Davidson has more than 30 years in the construction industry and has worked in a variety of roles, including administrative, accounting and office management.



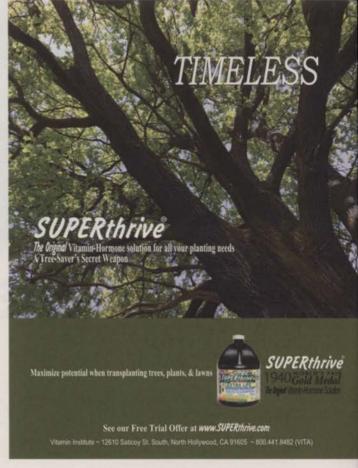
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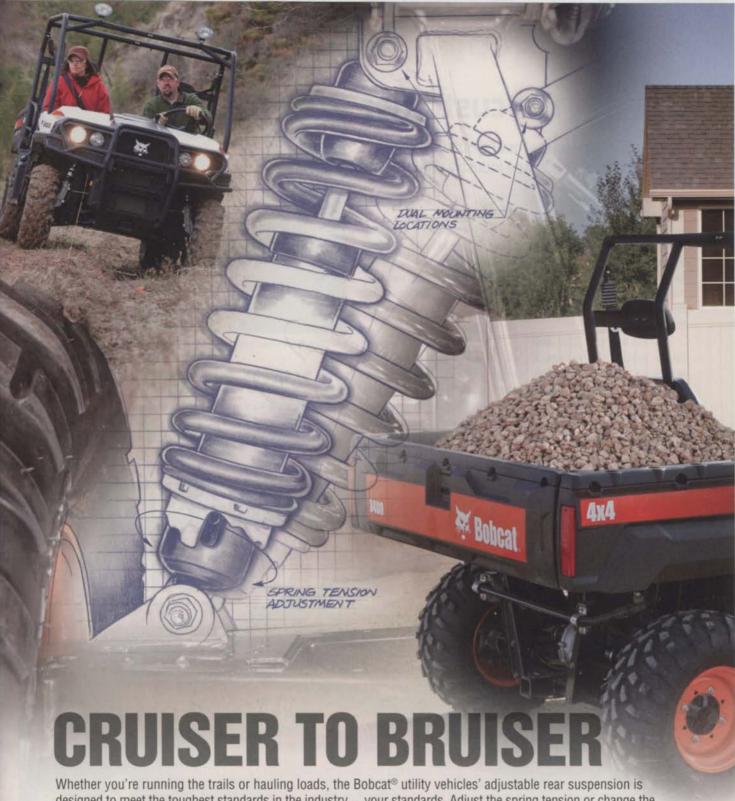
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Getting the customer

Contractors learned the ins and outs of sales as part of the 2012 Landscape Industry Show.

LOS ANGELES – John Binkele was enjoying a summer day in Arizona when a salesman knocked on his door. The salesmen pulled out his brochure and began to give his spiel about everything his company would do for Binkele.

Binkele stopped him and began asking the salesman questions about himself. The two had a friendly exchange and discovered they had a few things in common. And as soon as all that was done, "He kept right on going," Binkele said.

The salesman was breaking a major rule in sales. Instead of telling the customer what you can do for them, you first have to make a connection with them and find out what they want.

"One of the best things to do is develop questions to extract from customers what they want. Every customer is different," he said.

Binkele, who's with Ewing Education Services, was one



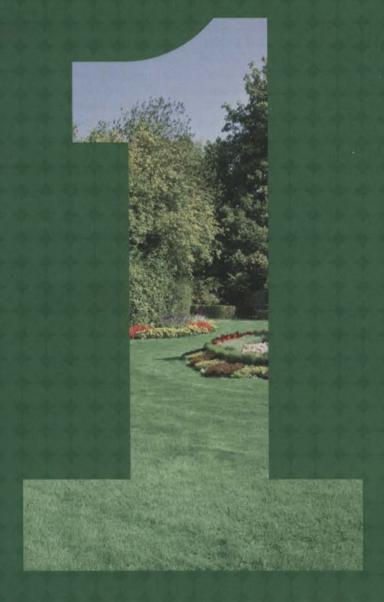
LIS gave West Coast contractors a chance to discuss the industry.

of the presenters at the California Landscape Contractors Association's Landscape Industry Show, Feb. 1-2, at the Los Angeles Convention

Center. His presentation, "Professional Selling Skills for the Landscape Contractor," focused on a multi-step approach called the Binkelian







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L&L ON THE ROAD

Sales Process. "Preparation is really the foundation for the sales process," he says. Part of that preparation is knowing what your value proposition is to the customer.

"If you're ever asked, 'Why should I buy from you?' you should have that answer ready to go. A stuttering or stammering response can really turn a customer off."

If you are stuck on what you think your value proposition should be, ask your current customers why they bought from you, and that will give you a good idea of what you do well. "You'll have a rock solid value proposition," he said. Some of Binkele's other steps include:

Build a rapport and a lasting relationship: It's about making a positive human connection with the prospect, which means putting them at ease.

To achieve this, have a smile on your face, speak in a pleasant and professional tone of voice, and if you missed a customer's initial inbound call, return it promptly.

Art of discovery: You should also have an inventory of questions ready to complete this step.

Ouestions could include. what motivated you to consider the renovation, what is the primary purpose of the landscape and, once you get a face-to-face meeting, ask them what sort of issues and hassles they want to avoid.

Effective listening: You don't have to offer solutions immediately. Listen like an eavesdropper before offering any suggestions or solutions because you will learn a lot.

Presenting: To make an effective proposal, set an agenda so you can maintain control of the meeting.

Asking: After you've made your presentation and taken more questions, don't make the big mistake a lot of inexperienced salespeople make - they don't ask for the sale. If you fail to ask for the sale, the person after you might ask, and get the job.

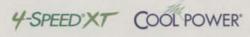
Hesitation: If a prospect hesitates, there is an underlying reason. Anticipate these hesitations and have responses ready to go that are backed by proof, testimonials and valid comparisons.

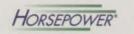
Follow-up: If you've been turned down, you have to act like a bloodhound and continue on the trail even after it's gotten ice cold.

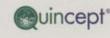
If you did your research, made the sale and did the job, send a letter or thank you card, make a personal phone call or make it a point to stop by and visit the project from time to time. L&L

The author is an associate editor with Lawn & Landscape. He can be reached at bhorn@gie.net.





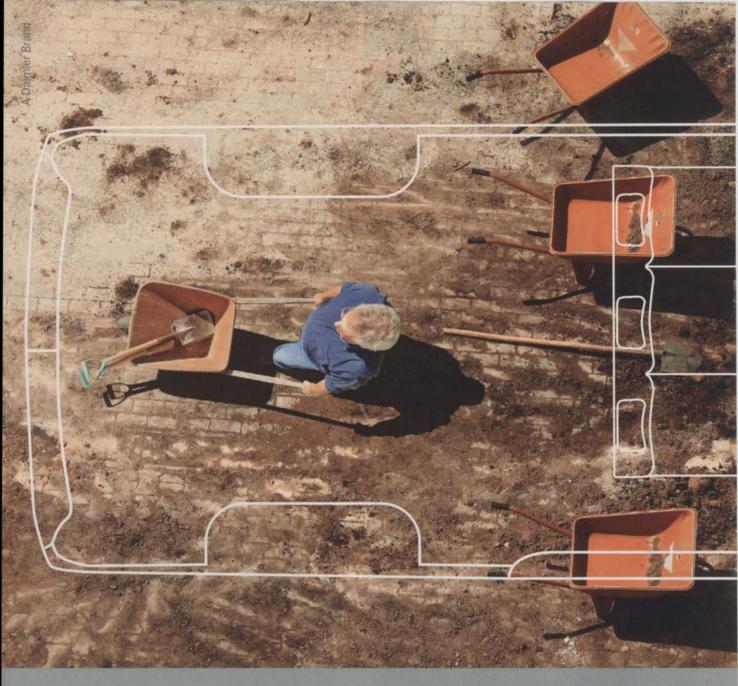






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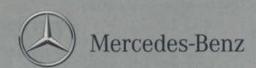
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GROW! in 2012

The annual conference emphasized the importance of a good plan and retaining employees and customers. By Carolyn LaWell

DAYTON, Ohio – All planning is good planning. That was one of the key messages Marty Grunder and the speakers at GROW! 2012 emphasized during the three-day event in early February that helped

businesses get on a track to grow this year.

More than 100 business owners and managers packed a hotel ballroom in Dayton, Ohio, to hear and learn from Grunder, author and con-

L&L ON THE ROAD

John Riley and Julia Pentecost of Wimberg Landscaping and Jeffrey Johns of Coastal Greenery set action plans.

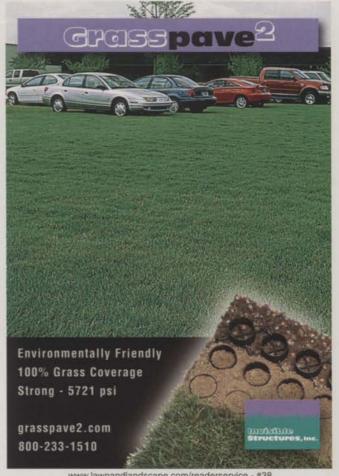
sultant Joe Calloway; Decra-Scape CEO Matt Caruso; and the author and international speaker, also known as the Pitbull of Personal Development," Larry Winget. Among the topics covered were hiring, keeping good employees, sales, customer service and efficiency.

Successful business owners take the time to step out of their business and create systems and processes to help the company grow.

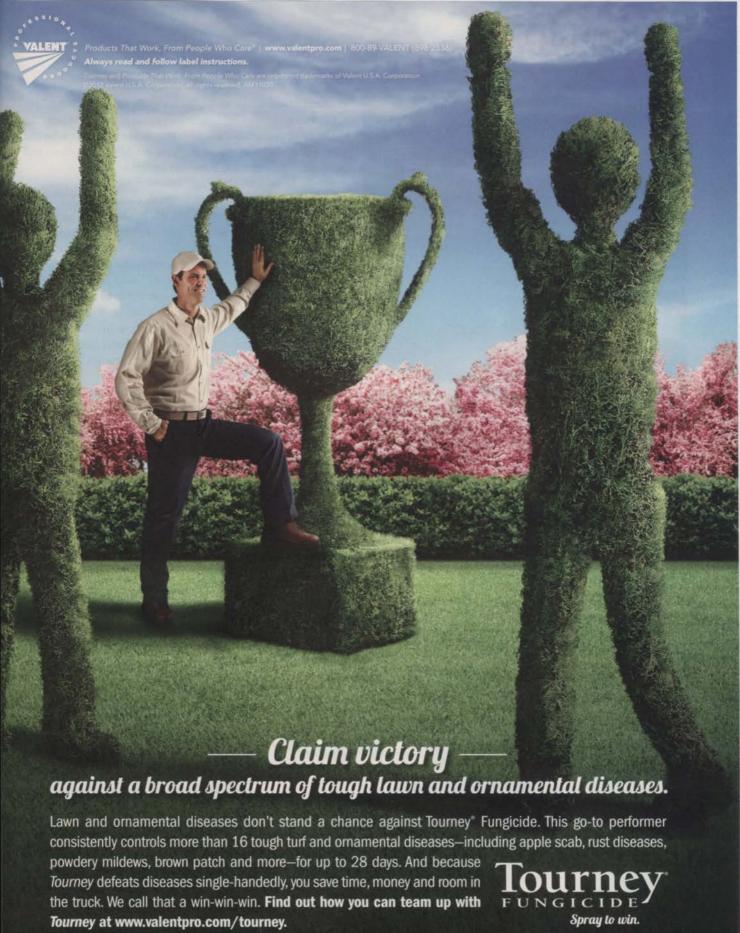
For example, Caruso spoke about how to hire, develop and retain good employees. In order to do that, he said, you have to create a picture of what your future team members should look like. Caruso suggested listing each position and then creating a profile of what the ideal candidate must have, needs to have and can't have.

Calloway challenged attendees to define what they thought their customers' experience was working with their company. He also said that all too often companies try to think out of the box and they get away from what they're really good at and what customers really want. "Be the best at what your





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L&L ON THE ROAD



Winget, the Pitbull of Personal Development, emphasized goal setting.

customer values the most," Calloway said.

Grunder presented a session on the elements of a good plan. As a general business rule, he said, all planning should start with the end in mind and it should involve key people in the process.

Here are the seven steps to a good plan:

Conduct a S.W.O.T. The group should start by listing the company's strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. "This is the basis for your plan," Grunder said. "The S.W.O.T. analysis helps you define reality, the way things are, and helps you think toward the desired

outcomes that you want." He also said it's important to use an outside facilitator who can present different options and question ideas.

Rank each S.W.O.T. Take each list - strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats - and rank the ideas mentioned under each category based on their level of importance to the company. "This can be one of the most exciting, exhilarating, energizing efforts you can take yourself through," he said.

Lay out the priorities. After ranking the S.W.O.T. ideas, decide which ones should be the company's priorities.





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L&L ON THE ROAD

Want a short tutorial on business growth? Grunder and Calloway did a webinar with Lawn & Landscape in January. Visit www. lawnandlandscape.com and search "Grow 2012."

Write a win statement. Take the priorities and discuss a win statement for each one, basically a strategy for how to achieve that priority. For example, if the goal is to increase customer referrals, define how much the increase should be and how to go about doing it.

Set a vision. "Vision is where we're going," Grunder said. "Vision is what you would like someone to recognize your company for." Develop the vision based on the company's S.W.O.T. analysis and remember that a vision is never finished, it's constantly being analyzed and evolving.

Set a mission. In simple terms, "What we're going to do on a daily basis to achieve our vision," Grunder said.

Set core values. The group should ask: What will help the company achieve all of the above? Grunder Landscaping operates on the four values of quality, leadership, teamwork and profitability. He said to pick four to six values that will make an impact

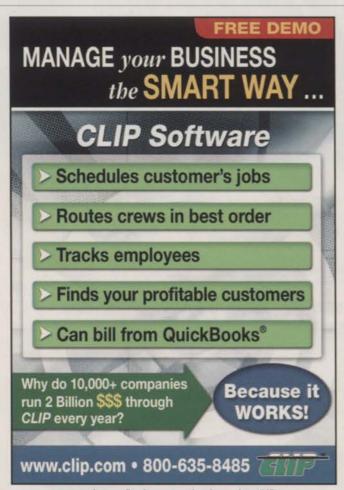


Grunder, Caruso and Calloway talk during a Q&A with attendees.

on your company, and then once those are set, constantly reinforce them.

A planning meeting that involves these steps opens the eyes of top management because they have the ability to step back from day-to-day work. "Good ideas tend to not come to us when we're fully engaged in work," he said. L&L

The author is an associate editor at Lawn & Landscape. She can be reached at clawell@gie.net.





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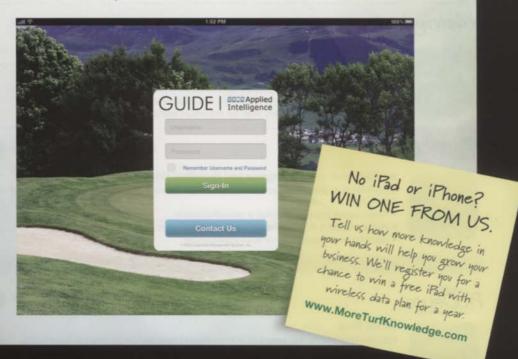
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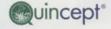




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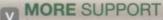
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DESIGN SOFTWARE AND CLOSING RATIOS

ASK THE EXPERTS is presented in partnership with PLANET's Trailblazers On Call program. Trailblazers are industry leaders who volunteer their time and expertise to give back to the industry.

Q: Can you recommend user-friendly landscape design software?

A: We use AutoCAD Lite. We find this to be a great way to design because we can share files with architects and engineers. We have also customized it to work well with our company. It does take some time to get use to, but we feel it is worth it. We have also heard good things about Vectorworks and DynaSCAPE, but have never used them.

PLANET Trailblazer, Mark Borst, Landscape Industry Certified Technician, Borst Landscape & Design

We researched this for years and we love DynaSCAPE as do our designers.



PLANET Traliblazer, Jan-Gerrit Bouwman, RLA, MLA, ASLA, Grant & Power Landscaping, Inc.

Q: Where can I find the industry average for sales closing ratios for landscaping projects?

A: I have been in the landscape industry for 40 years and have never heard of an industry average closing ratio. Now, there certainly are closing ratios for individual companies and salespeople for sure, but I have not heard of anyone compiling such data among companies, and even if they did, I don't think it would be valid.

With that said, closing ratios can vary greatly. What I have seen in this difficult economic climate are closing ratios decreasing, with sales people bidding more jobs and getting less work. But, there are so many variables. For example, owners who are great salespeople and can somewhat control pricing can have a closing ratio of 50 percent. Companies that don't have sharp estimating figures can have a closing ratio as low as 10 percent. The reverse can also be true. When pricing or estimating hours are too low, the closing ratio can be more than 50 percent.

So, if you're estimating is sharp and on target, your pricing is right so the company makes money, and your people are performing their jobs with efficiency, I would be happy with somewhere between a 20 percent and 30 percent closing ratio in this market. L&L

PLANET Trailblazer, Ed Laflamme, Landscape Industry Certified Manager, The Harvest Group

MARCH 2012

Have a

question for the

Butt booting

Companies in one Ohio city are cleaning up and recycling cigarette butts to give their town a fresh look.

t's not often that a company can help out a charity, and do it with little to no monetary involvement. But green industry businesses in Columbus, Ohio, are doing just that through KickbuttColumbus!, a program designed to clean up cigarette butts and other litter at highway entrance and exit ramps – the gateways to the city.

The idea developed in 2009 when Patrick Lynch and some members of a group he was involved with were looking to get participate in a community service project.

"We talked about donating this, and donating that," Lynch says, "and I kind of came up with this idea of, 'Well, why don't we pull together as contractors and do a citywide cleanup?"

After investigating, Lynch found the organization Keep Columbus Beautiful was

more than willing to help out. He then reached out to local industry groups like the Ohio Nursery and Landscape Association and the Columbus Landscape Association. Lynch says an activity like this is something a green industry company in any state could

Volunteers found all sorts of interesting things during last year's event, including a no parking sign.





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Volunteers in the photo below participate in a warm-up before the clean-up gets underway. The group covers 25-35 highway ramps and will pick-up about 7 tons of trash.



Good Works is an occasional feature that highlights charitable projects our readers are working on. If you'd like to see your company's recent good work profiled, send an email to Associate Editor Brian Horn at bhorn@gie.net.

accomplish. And it makes sense for the industry to take part in a clean-up because of what the community has done for you.

"I think it's right up the alley with what we do," he says. "We're in the business of beautifying our environment in general, whether it be in someone's front or backyard or be it at some company we maintain. I think it's good that we set a precedent for people, and also to give back.

"Our community gives a lot of work to us. Whether we work for municipalities or we're working for the Joneses or XYZ corporation. So it's a good way for the green industry to give back to the community by donating time and getting something done."

Lynch says the groups cover 25-35 highway ramps and pick up 7 tons of trash and more than 65,000 cigarette butts, which are also recycled.

The event will happen March 31, and volunteers can sign up days before the event at www.kickbuttcolumbus.eventbrite.com to participate. The photos here are from last year's event. You can view more photos at www.facebook.com/kickbuttcolumbus. L&L





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RESEARCH

52%

The National Federation of Independent Businesses found most companies are staying the course when it comes to marketing. A survey conducted on what is stunting small business growth found that 52% of businesses expect little to no changes in their marketing plans, while 15% expect to make significant changes.

167%

Green roofs have proved to be more effective in the summer months and for buildings that don't have proper insulation, according to research by Brad Rowe, professor of horticulture at Michigan State University. Rowe is conducting research on a green roof installed on the university's Plant and Soil Sciences building, and he shared some of his findings on the Greening of the Great Lakes radio show. During the winter months, 13 percent of the heat was prevented from leaving the building. And in the summer, the outside heat and energy coming into the building was reduced by 167 percent.

A recent Small Business Opinion Poll commissioned by insurance company EMPLOYERS found one-third or 38% of small business decision makers are using smartphones and tablets to run their companies. The poll also found 41% said they are interested in using apps for mobile banking, customer relationship management, risk management and payroll management.

\$27.2 million

California's hybrid rose industry has withered as homeowners across the country have chosen less lavish plants to install. The annual wholesale value of California's rose crop dropped from a high of \$61.05 million in 2003 to \$27.2 million in 2010, a 55 percent decrease, Hoy Carman, a nursery industry expert and retired University of California Davis professor, recently told "The Sacramento Bee."

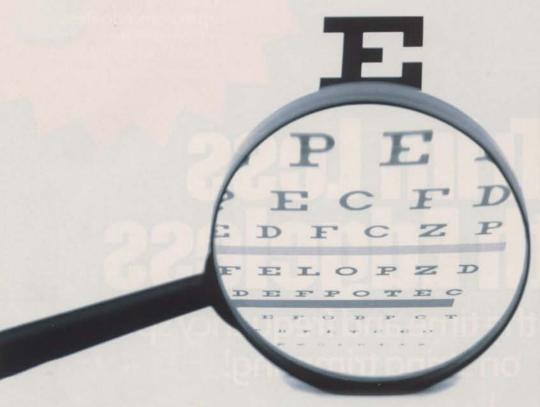


The Equipment Leasing and Finance
Association's Monthly Leasing and Finance
Index hit a four-year high in December
2011, showing easing credit standards
and more lease applications approved. The
overall new business volume was \$10.8
billion, up 20 percent from volume of \$9
billion in December 2010. The last month
the index rose above \$10 billion was
December 2007.









Stay focused

n 2012, I believe there's going to be an opportunity for many of us to grow our companies. I'm not an economist, but the trends I see so far point to a better business climate for all of us. Let's hope I'm right. And while I hope I'm right, I'm not using "hope" as a strategy to grow Grunder Landscaping Co.

There are all types of strategies that I see green industry companies employ. Some wander aimlessly from client to client, segment to segment, year to year. Others get focused on some days or weeks, lose that focus and then end up lost. But the most successful ones focus on a segment of the industry, clearly identify the client and then work like heck to own that space. This is the strategy I "hope" you'll use. Let me explain.

The two most successful

landscapers I know are
Mike Rorie, who started
Groundmasters in Cincinnati,
Ohio, and sold it a few years
ago, and Frank Mariani, who
turned his father's small mowing
business into a multi-milliondollar giant north of Chicago. Both
of these brilliant entrepreneurs
focused on a certain client in a
certain market and then went
after it and won.

Mike started Groundmasters in 1979 outside of Cincinnati, like many of us did, with a pickup truck and a push mower. Along the way, he found commercial grounds maintenance to be what he understood the best, did the best and made the most money at. (If you ever see Mike on a program at a green industry event, I'd do whatever you have to do to go see him.) He didn't Just get lucky; trust me. His

determination is world class and he ran Groundmasters to a point he felt it best to let someone else take it the rest of the way. Today, his company is part of the industry giant Brickman.

Mike grew Groundmasters by turning down the type of work that wasn't a fit for what he did best. If he got a call to install a pool in someone's backyard and landscape it, he said no. If he got a call to landscape a mall in Atlanta in the winter, he said no. If he got a call to do any type of work that wasn't a bull's-eye for the market he had defined, his team said no.

This incredible focus enabled him to make replication easier to attain. In every step of his business, he was able to keep things simple because the client was clearly defined. They were able to become a specialist

instead of a generalist. So, I ask you now, how clearly defined is your client?

Frank's Mariani Landscape in Lake Bluff, Ill., had a different focus than Groundmasters and it worked – actually still does today, as Frank has not sold out. His focus is high-end landscape design/build and maintenance. And that focus works for him too. If Midway Airport calls Frank and asks him or his team to put in a bid for the snow removal, the answer is no ... make that NO!!!

If a local shopping mall calls them and says they are taking bids and their number one issue in picking a contractor is price, Frank and his team politely say, "no, thank you." Frank's laser-like focus in a market has paid him well through the years.

By staying in his sweet spot, Frank's team has become very good at taking care of the client. He knows what they do well and sells that, not something they don't do well or don't enjoy doing. I hope you are getting the lesson this month.

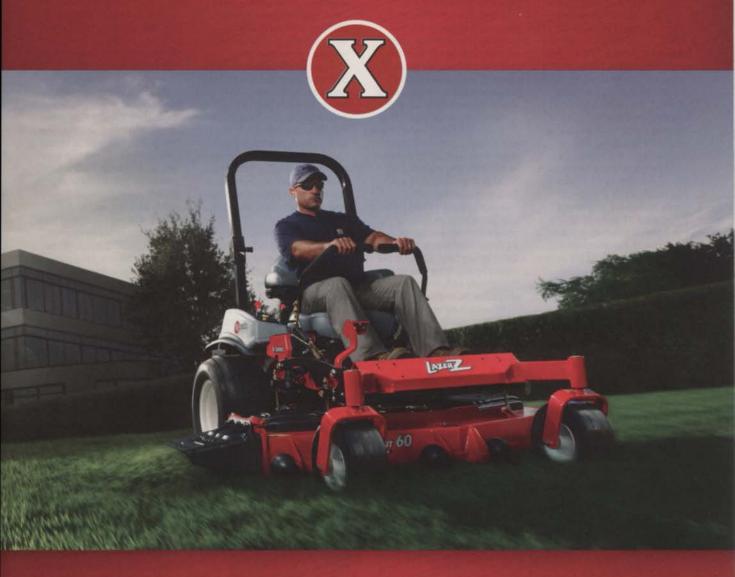
It is so hard in business to say no. We're coming off a few bad years, ladies and gentlemen; it's been about surviving. I know. But you must know the client that fits you best.

Pick the ones you enjoy working with, appreciate you and are profitable with. To do anything else is a mistake. Like a mentor of mine told me three years ago when the recession started, "You do in the short term what you would do in the long term and you will be just fine." Words I have lived by and words that worked. They'll work for you too; you just have to be focused enough to stick with it.

Now, who is your ideal client? What's your sweet spot? Focus on those type of clients and prospects and success will be easier to attain. L&L

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Many eggs, many baskets

inally, after five years of doom and gloom. there's some good news coming from the housing industry. So says a January 16, 2012 front page story in USA Today entitled, "Housing outlook is more upbeat: Experts predict a turnaround is near." The article goes on to say that while the "Recovery is expected to be slow, and home prices are widely expected to fall this year," it is a recovery nonetheless. Existing home sales are expected to rise 12 percent, and construction of singlefamily homes are anticipated to increase 37 percent. All of this adds up to robust pressure on stocks as the article goes on to say, "The S&P 1500 homebuilding index is up 38 percent since mid-October, vs. 7 percent for the S&P 500." While things may be turning around, read on and find out how to avoid falling victim to another housing crisis.

WHAT HAPPENED? In the late 1980s and early 1990s. I worked with a number of landscape companies that primarily installed landscapes on new home production lots. models and common areas (streetscapes, small parks). New home sales were booming and there seemed to be no end in sight to the good times. One Southern California home builder, in particular, predicted that it would build and sell 500 homes in 1990 ranging in price from \$300,000-\$500,000. It built 500, and sold fifty.

A company that I was tracking saw its installation revenue plunge from an average of \$120,000 per month in January 1990 to less than \$20,000 per month by July. It happened just that quickly and, like the current recession, no one saw it coming.

Recently I worked with a number of clients in this market. Their story is eerily similar to that of the early 1990s. Three landscapers in the Southwestern

home lots each month. Many more new home permits were being approved, as there was plenty of work for everyone. Unexpectedly, it all but dried up within a few months.

A new single-family housing development in the mountains of Colorado, where new homes were selling for \$400,000-\$500,000 in early 2008, saw production literally stop overnight. Thirty homes, in various stages of construction, were abandoned by contractors. Stacks of sheetrock. buckets of nails and hundreds of roof trusses littered the site. Four years later, not much has changed.

Many landscape contractors who did not have a diversified base of maintenance and service work to supplement their installation base went out of business. Many more suffered greatly as cash flow dried up in conjunction with their vanishing construction backlogs. In desperation, many contractors jumped into maintenance and service work. New to the market, they could not compete based on their record for quality of work. So they competed based on being the lowest price in town. Quality and margins were sacrificed as a feeding frenzy mentality

intensified.

LESSONS LEARNED. The primary lesson from all of this is diversify, diversify, diversify, In football they say, "If you live by the blitz, you'll die by the blitz." It's the same in business. If you live by installation alone, sooner or later, you'll probably die by installation alone. Diversification isn't easy but if you're going to avoid the pitfalls of recessionary cycles, diversify you must. Too many contractors focus on doing only the type of work that they enjoy. Installation contractors usually do not like maintenance or service related work. They thrive on the "rush" or the chaos of doing installation jobs. It's just the opposite for most maintenance contractors and service providers. They prefer predictability to chaos. However, the smart thing is to do both.

CONCLUSION. The contractors in the new home landscape installation market that I recently met with have all weathered the current economic storm. They've widened their product mix to include much more maintenance and service work. For some, it has been a very painful adjustment. Most are attempting to achieve a 50/50 installation versus maintenance book of business.

I tell my clients who are primarily focused on doing installation work that the first thing to disappear in a recession is installation work. You may not like doing service or maintenance work but it will make you money in a down economy. I also tell them, if it's excitement that you want, remember, if you're making money, you can always buy excitement. L&L



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STEVE CESARE is an industrial psychologist with the Harvest Group, a landscape consulting group. www.harvestlandscapeconsulting.com; scesare@giemedia.com



Worker safety and savings

compensation insurance premiums, driven in large part by a company's Experience Modification Rate (XMOD), continue to increase, all the while draining financial capital from the company's profit margin. Sadly, many landscape companies have resigned themselves to the position that this is simply an administrative process over which they have little control. Nothing could be further from the truth: Apathy is not the answer; action is.

LEVERAGE THE VENDOR

Landscapers must demand more direct service from their workers' compensation vendors to reduce their XMOD. In most cases, workers' compensation vendors simply provide routine administrative services, while failing to perform any operational support to the landscape company. Such limited clerical scope does not improve the landscape company's safety culture or its' XMOD. That service relationship is insufficient, insincere, and inequitable; it must be redefined in favor of the landscapers. After all, they are making the payments.

At the time of policy renewal, landscapers should require all potential vendors submit a detailed tactical plan that will decrease the company's XMOD by 10-15 percent for the next calculated year. Common interventions include: one-page safety summaries that can be distributed to all employees as

a weekly payroll stuffer; monthly yard safety audits, job site safety audits and field safety training sessions conducted by the vendor and monthly on-site claims review sessions to review loss run reports and facilitate timely closure of existing claims.

This level of involvement, analysis, and resource commitment demanded by the landscaper and provided by the vendor defines a partnership aimed sincerely at improving employee safety and company success, rather than a commoditized relationship premised on apathy.

SAFETY PROGRAMS. Most landscape companies have tailgate sessions, safety videotapes and personal protective equipment. That is a minimalist approach to safety. Additional investment is required to reduce a company's XMOD. For example, a company should align itself with the workers' compensation vendor medical provider network (MPN) to control treatment costs, reduce fraudulent claims and preserve quality care. Formal reliance on the MPN can also benefit the landscaping company by emphasizing an aggressive return-to work program, FMLA compliance and OSHA injury reporting procedures.

An effective drug testing program can also contribute to a reduced XMOD. Companies that offer pre-employment, post-accident/injury and reasonable suspicion drug testing as part of the MPN are taking accelerated measures to minimize injury occurrence. Apathetic landscapers view drug testing programs as another cost to be eliminated; conversely, landscapers trying to reduce their XMOD view drug testing programs as part of their strategic investment to promote employee safety and minimize workers' compensation costs.

ACCOUNTABILITY. Landscapers must track safety accountability

with the same vigilance as they do for revenue, customer service and profit.

To that end, every foreman, superintendent and executive should be assigned safety goals and be evaluated annually on those standards (e.g., incident rate, days lost, cost) for their respective span of control. These data should be reviewed during each monthly management team meeting with specific detail, implication, and personal accountability being well documented.

At the time of annual performance reviews, positive year-to-year change should be reflected in public recognition and a pay raise; negative year-to-year change should be reflected in formal disciplinary action.

Without continuous executive-level accountability, systematic improvement to a company's XMOD cannot occur.

Every employee injured on the job should be interviewed by a safety panel consisting of three company managers (e.g., safety coordinator, account manager and an executive) focused on investigating the injury, the employee, and the action steps to eliminate reoccurrence. This the importance of safety to the workforce, reduces the likelihood of fraudulent claims and positions the employee directly in front of those managers accountable for their own safety goals.

Safety bonuses (e.g., pay, gift cards, raffle) for a continuous injury-free period of time should be designed fairly and distributed publicly by company executives.

SUMMARY. Landscapers must take an active role in reducing workers' compensation costs associated with their XMOD.

Their mature, systematic, and balanced ability to leverage heretofore uninvolved vendors, implement value-added safety programs, and promote a culture of accountability toward safety, will benefit their employees, their companies and their financial future. L&L

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CUTTING GRASS, NOT CORNERS.

By Kristen Hampshire

Building a board

Adam Linnemann formed a board of advisers to get an outside perspective on business issues and to grow his company.





Linnemann has 15 crewmembers and wants to grow.

n A-team of advisers is giving Adam A Linnemann the outside perspective he needs to make some significant business decisions for Linnemann Lawn Care & Landscaping. Bringing in outside voices is a big deal for Linnemann, who started his business at age 14, before he even had a driver's license. Today, the Columbia, Ill.-based firm is 15 crewmembers strong, and it brought in about \$700,000 in revenues last year.

Here's how Linnemann chose his advisory team to help him make challenging decisions.

CHOOSING THE CAST. Pulling in a few good friends (and obligating a family member or two) to join the board would have been easy. Who's going to say no to a buddy asking for help? And as for providing feedback, the friends-and-family clan is waiting for an invitation to participate. But how possible is it for people we know well and like a lot to bring an honest opinion to the table? That, of course, depends on your friends and family.

Linnemann decided when searching for a board, to pursue candidates that he knew were highly qualified - people he didn't personally know all that well.

"We knew we had our own ideas about how to run the business, and we felt it would be good to get ideas from people who are outside of the company, people we trust," Linnemann says.

Linnemann did a lot of asking around, and he gathered referrals. He invited a Boeing employee who specializes in technology management, a commercial banker and an owner of a John Deere dealership with locations in and around Linnemann's service area. He offered each a small payment for participating in each board meeting (so far, none have accepted the honorarium).

The mix of professionals on Linnemann's board is what makes the team so valuable. For example, the technology manager can sound off on customer relationship management (CRM) software options and help Linnemann take inventory of his tech suite, what works and what doesn't. The dealer is practiced in sales and has industry insight. "He has the knowledge of what other landscapers in our area are doing and purchasing," Linnemann says. "But because he's a dealer, he's not in direct competition with us - and he has four or five locations in the area where we want to expand our business."

The commercial banker can advise on growth decisions, including acquisitions. This input is important for Linnemann, who just purchased a smaller lawn care firm and grew his customer base that way.

Choosing a board from the outside is giving him insight on how customers see his business. "I wanted to see what (our advisers') perception is of our company and how they see us, which is, in turn, how our clients may see us," he says.



Read how Linnemann's board of advisers helped him reconfigure his service offering and add technology at www/lawnandlandscape. com/newsletters.



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WHAT'S ON THE MENU?

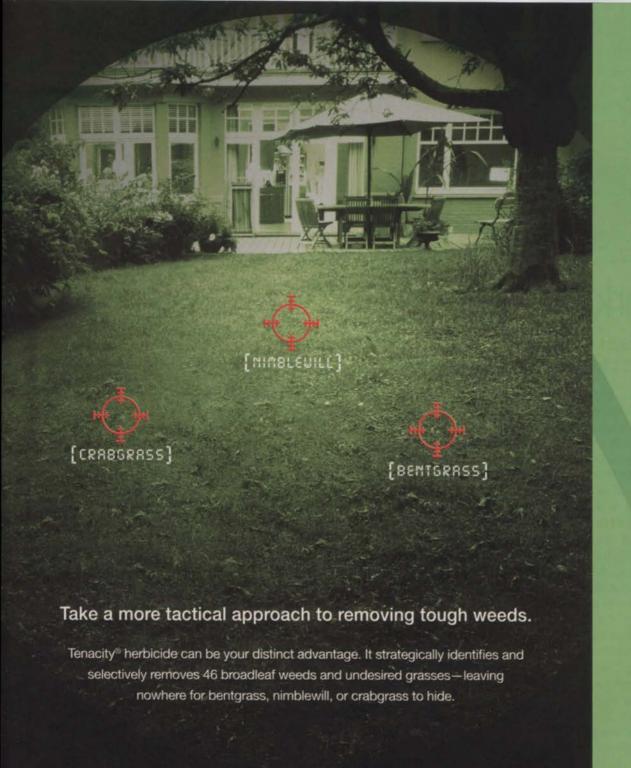
enus work in the fast-food industry, so why not landscape maintenance? That's what Adam Linnemann's board of directors decided when coming up with ideas for Linnemann to branch out his business, Linnemann Lawn Care & Landscaping.

Linnemann hopes to expand his service area, and creating set programs that give clients simple choices and will help facilitate the sales process. At least, that's the plan.

Linnemann offers discounts to encourage clients to purchase programs, and to buy up the supreme package, a turn-key lawn care, maintenance and clean-up offering that covers every outdoor base. The entry-level package - basic mow, blow and six-step fertilization program - is called the pro package. Customers who opt for this can save 5 percent on annual services.

A step up from basic is the ultra, which includes aeration and over-seeding, plus complete tree and shrub care. The savings for this menu choice is 10 percent. With the primo elite package. customers can save 15

Plus, clients that prepay for the year can save 5 percent off any package. So far, the prepay discount is not catching on. "People want to see the money in their bank accounts instead," Linnemann says.





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Working together

Three ways irrigation designers and installers can ensure a smooth project.

n the past, there has been some butting of heads when it comes to the world of irrigation design versus the

world of installation. But Timothy Malooly, president of Water in Motion, a water consulting firm that designs and specifies landscape irrigation systems, says it doesn't have to be that way.

"In the world of irrigation installation, the concept of design is often met with rolling eyes by the contracting community," says Malooly, who also owns an irrigation contracting business in his local market. "But there's no reason that the process has to be a negative experience."

Malooly suggests keeping the following three points in mind to help ensure a smooth project.



Malool

1. Collegial conversation. Forming a friendly relationship is important – and a demonstration of professionalism.

"Instead of having an adversarial argument, have a collegial conversation," Malooly says. "It can be to your benefit. An installing contractor should consider that the consulting designer likely has the direct ear of the client and knows why a given approach is included.

By the same token, a contractor may have an idea, method or experience worthy of consideration out of concern for the client's best interest. How the parties interact is often key to a successful outcome."

2. Rely on partners. Malooly says it's likely that the consultant has a wealth of helpful information about a project that an installing contractor may appreciate. "The designer knows why something was designed a certain way, which can be vital," he says. "And generally speaking, an irrigation consultant may have an inside track on new and emerging technologies. Because of their proximity to

knowledge of trends in building, landscape architecture or civil engineering, they'll have a good read on what's coming down the pike."

Likewise, a contractor may have an inside track on installation techniques and practical applicability of certain elements that the consultant might consider.

3. Everyone can "win." It's important for all parties to remember that the design was made with the client's best interest – and their specific wants – in mind. But Malooly says that, more often than not, an installing contractor may start to make changes that deviate from those original plans without

working collegially with the consultant or because they think they can do it better. Such behavior often causes major and unnecessary problems on projects.

Malooly owns
three water-related
companies. Learn
how he's grown his
design, installation
and fountain
businesses at www.
lawnandlandscape.
com/newsletters.



THE BIGGER PICTURE

While everyone is busy talking about efficient irrigation and new smart technology trends, there's still a lack of unification that's standing in the way of making these ideas reality, Malooly says. If the green industry's great thinkers could just practice more of what they preach there could be some big changes on the horizon.

"The fact of the matter is that among our current conversations, which focus on concerns over uses of chemicals, when to use them, and how to use them – as well as when and how to use water – all of that is contrasted directly with what consumers see and do every day," says Malooly, "You'll have articulate and educated industry

professionals going to meetings at the state, regional or national level and making persuasive conversation about concentrating on science-based thoughts and formulating new policies. But the fact of the matter is those very people, after the meeting, will get in their car on a rainy day and drive home and see lawn sprinkler systems running in the rain. That completely counters everything they just talked about."

Malooly believes that the people who actually practice conservancy are a vast minority in the green industry. But he sees room for change. "The industry has got to find a way to unify its message and clean up its own practices in order to maintain credibility in those discussions regarding the decisions we make," he says. "If we can do that, there's so much potential for what we can achieve as an industry."

A SUPPLEMENT TO

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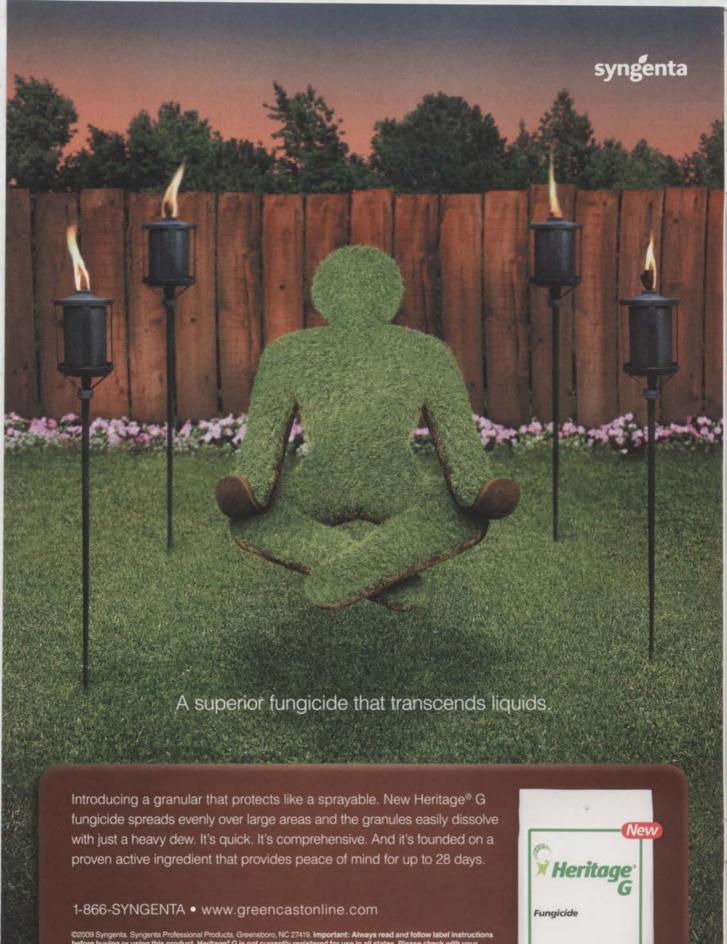
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Laurie Riggs

eadership can be hard to quantify. But when you see it, feel it or are inspired by it, you realize exactly what leadership is.

If someone asked you to describe leadership, you might say leaders are committed. Leaders are actively involved in their industry. Leaders run businesses that are successful in the eyes of both their customers and their employees. And leaders – quite simply – can motivate and bring people together.

The "recession years" have forced many lawn and landscape professionals to redefine their businesses and streamline their operations to increase efficiency and maintain profitability. It has not been easy, but leaders find a way to take care of their customers their employees and their businesses.

Syngenta is proud to sponsor *Lawn & Landscape's* Leadership Awards, which highlight the innovation and perseverance lawn and landscape professionals display year in and year out.

As a business partner to the lawn and landscape professional, Syngenta strives to provide the products, tools and resources lawn care operators need to be successful.

The many resources Syngenta invests each year on R&D result in a line of innovative turf products designed to deliver quality results. And we will continue to invest in research to make residential and commercial turf healthier and the job of the lawn care operator easier.

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Syngenta is poised to introduce three new products in 2012 specifically designed for the lawn and landscape professional. Stay tuned for more news on these introductions.

It is no secret that the past few years have been challenging in this industry, but there is great hope for a bright future – and it is a future Syngenta is committed to help improve for all the customers and organizations we serve.

Syngenta is proud to support organizations such as PLANET," RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment)" and Project EverGreen that are assisting professionals in unifying the industry.

Laurie Riggs Lawn Care Marketing Manager Syngenta

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More than a job

It's not a paycheck that keeps Pam Stark coming back to work at ValleyCrest every day. It's in her blood. By Brian Horn

hen most couples celebrate a 25th wedding anniversary, the husband can show his appreciation for his wife in a number of ways. You know, the stuff you see in commercials – jewelry, a getaway to an exotic island or some romantic surprise. But that wasn't what Harry Stark bought his wife, Joan, for their 25th anniversary. He showered his wife with love through a reel mower.

"She wouldn't let anybody else touch the mower because she didn't think anyone in the family could mow as well as she did," says Pam Stark, the couple's daughter and vice president of customer satisfaction of ValleyCrest Landscape Cos.

With a mother who loved

gardening, a father who was a grading contractor and a brother, Steve, who ended up with a Ph.D. in entomology, Stark had dirt in her veins. She chose to get her fix in the landscaping industry.

But that fix has turned into something much more, With almost 37 years at ValleyCrest, it's no surprise that those who have worked with her all point to her passion for and knowledge of the industry as the focal point of what has made her a success.

"First and foremost, Pam has a real passion for plants," says Judy Guido, who worked with Stark at ValleyCrest and is still friends with her. "Whether it's in the work place or you are going to a business meeting



Stark was ValleyCrest's first female vice president.

and you are walking past a building ... she has a love of plants and nature."

And those that work with her feed off her passion for the green industry.

"Her level of enthusiasm just blows people away and it is 24 hours a day," says, Roger Zino, CEO of Valley-Crest Landscape Cos. "It's genuine. I wish the world was filled with people like Pam Stark."

But don't get the wrong idea. Stark isn't that annoying type of employee who has so much energy you just want them to go away. "It's not the Energizer bunny energy," Zino says. "She just cares about what she's doing and wants to help people improve. She is unique."

And even though Stark never married or had kids, she still has a nurturing touch. "My name for Pam," Guido says, "has always been 'Mother Nature.' To me that depicts her."

And getting back to Stark's mother, she says mom and dad recently moved from their home, and as part of the sale, the reel mower stayed with the home. "I swear she shed more tears over that mower than she did leaving the house," Stark laughs.

'BYE' THE NUMBERS. Working with plants was part of Stark's life at a young age, but her parents never pushed her to get involved in the industry. Even though her mother and grandmother were avid gardeners – and some of her fondest memories of her childhood were shopping for plants with her mother and working in the yard – she didn't seek out a career in the green industry.

Instead, she wanted to focus on math, which wouldn't have been a bad

decision either for Stark. She took college level calculus in high school, and was certainly destined for a successful career in numbers. But that all changed when she paid a visit to Cal Poly, San Luis Obispo, and fell in the love with the campus, and a career path she didn't know existed.

"That was the first time I understood there was a way to major in horticulture and agriculture," she says.

But even then, it wasn't landscaping that was her focus. Rather, she was heading into the nursery world.

"I was really into germinating and growing annual and perennial plants at that time, so that's why I was thinking, maybe I'll go into the nursery end of the business," she says. "But, I took another serendipitous leap."

ROOKIE HAZING. Stark doesn't remember why she jumped from nurseries to landscaping, but she can recall her first day on the job.

"It was just intimidating at the time because I was the only woman who showed up in the yard," Stark says.

She wasn't treated better or worse because she was a woman. Stark says she was treated fairly, and got the same hazing and grunt work that you'd expect for the new kid on the block.

"We went out to an office property and right by the front door, in the turf, was a gopher mound, and the gopher was damaging the look of the building," she says.

So, her foreman had ev-

With Stark out of earshot, Sperber said she was the most-talented horticulturist he had ever met.

eryone else on the crew mow, while the foreman and Stark took care of the critter, which she wasn't too concerned about at first. After all, there were pellets that you could just drop into a tunnel, and eventually, they would take care of the gopher.

"And he gets a hose out and a shovel, which is the really brutal old fashioned way. And I think he wanted to get it done now as opposed to waiting for the gopher to find the pellets," she says. "Luckily I got the hose end trying to flush the gopher out of the hole and (he) hit him over the head with a shovel. So I thought, great, this is the start to my job in the field."

That same day, they went to a beautiful office project of high rise buildings that faced a courtyard filled with what seemed like hundreds of 10-by-10 squares of turf with little concrete walks between them. It would be Stark's' job to trim the edges ... with a blade edger.

"I could do a blade edger straight along a pathway for a pretty long distance and be OK," she says. "But when you have to make turn after turn after turn – I'm sure today they use a weed eater. But back then, we used blade edgers."

Stark is sure the crew wondered if she would get fed up and quit. If any of them thought she'd head for the highway, and a new career choice, they were very, very wrong.

ON HER WAY UP. Stark quickly worked her way up to foreman, which isn't uncommon for a college graduate, but she still got funny looks from customers.

"Eventually, when I became a crew leader, and I remember, I'd have people stopping me on the job when I was working with a crew, because I worked right along with them, and they'd say, 'Oh, this is interesting, is this your husband's company' or something like

that," she says. "I'd say, 'No, this is my job and I chose to have it.' So, that was actually the most challenging time. It took a couple of years for everybody to get it that I could pull my own weight, contribute and do a good job."

Stark eventually became the first female branch manager in ValleyCrest history. And it was during this time that Zino learned a lesson from Stark.

Stark had just opened the company's Palm Springs branch, and she had just a tough meeting with one of the branch's main clients. This client – a big reason ValleyCrest had opened the branch in the first place – wasn't happy and let Stark know it.

"She was driving home and she said she realized 'If this customer fires me, I don't have a job, so, I better make sure the customer is satisfied," Zino says. "And I think that relatively simple



Stark doesn't like to sit; her standing desk keeps her moving.

story that says, 'Hey guys, at the end of the day without our customers, none of us have jobs. So let's figure out how to completely satisfy them.'

"It's a very simple concept, but I would say when I think of Pam, I think of that story. And I can give that message out every week to people."

And with that attitude, it's no surprise Stark had the idea for and is now the vice president of customer satisfaction at ValleyCrest.

In a nutshell, Stark's primary role is to make sure she gathers accurate customer feedback that is actionable and that will drive growth and improvement in the businesses because, in her words, "We exist because we have customers."

But Andy Mandell, CEO of ValleyCrest Landscape Development, says it's much more than that. He says Stark takes customer service to the next level and gets to the root of why someone cancelled and how they can avoid it in the future. But



Burton Sperber, who was also a magician, shows Stark a trick.

almost as important, she trains others to get the most out of the customers when it comes to their thoughts on ValleyCrest's service.

"I describe Pam as our customer satisfaction evangelist," he says. "She is really the person that keeps the energy and focus up on customer satisfaction."

STRIVING FOR THE BEST.

Stark says early on in her life she was much more competitive than she is now.

"I used to do 100-mile bike races, small triathlons and water ski and snow ski," she says. "I'm always outdoors

"It was competitive when I was younger – I like the challenge and the thrill. But then later in life, it was just more fun."

While that competitive drive has mellowed, the passion hasn't for all things green. "I've literally been married to my job, especially in the early days, and then kind of just got used to it," she says. "Even though I don't have kids, I have a ton of plants and that's my hobby, my passion, and I'm very proud of them."

But it's not just zeal and style that separates Stark from the pack. It's substance: Guido remembers riding in a van with Valley-Crest founder, the late Burton S. Sperber, and Stark.

With Stark out of ear-

shot, Sperber said Stark was the most-talented horticulturist he'd ever met.

"And coming from him," Guido says, "those are huge accolades."

NO END IN SIGHT. Stark doesn't have any plans to retire in the near future, or change her position.

But when she does decide to hang it up, she would love to volunteer somewhere – surprise, surprise – in the green industry.

"When I retire I intend to volunteer at a couple of botanic gardens," she says.

But has she ever thought about what her life would be like working outside of the green industry?

"No, never," she says.

"I like to say we make the world a better place to be — to live, to work, to play. From the growing side of the industry, to the construction to the maintenance, the industry does great things for the Earth."

The author is an associate editor at Lawn & Landscape. He can be reached at bhorn@gie.net.

THROUGH THE YEARS

HERE'S AN OUTLINE OF STARK'S MOVE UP THE VALLEYCREST LADDER

1975-76	1977	1978	1982	1983	1989
Worked in field operations as a gardener- trainee and foreman	Trained in estimating and sales	Promoted to manager of "East bay" branch of Northern California, the first woman branch manager at ValleyCrest	Opened up a new maintenance branch in Palm Springs, Calif., and was branch manager there for seven years	Promoted to Vice President, the first female VP at ValleyCrest	Moved to ValleyCrest corporate to develop customer satisfaction program



The Perfectionist



Schill spends as much time with his family as possible.

Jerry Schill doesn't want to hear about what he can't do. By Chuck Bowen

very day I'm motivated by our people. I'm not going to be happy until they can have everything they want. We're competitive. Every day something's broken, it needs fixed, and every day something is obsolete and needs to be retooled. If we don't push, we may never know what could have been. And there's always a better way."

Because you'll never get there.

"No."

But the idea is that you can.

"Yeah. It's scary thinking you can't. You don't accept it."



Above, Schill at the farm with his girlfriend's son, Mason, and dressed as Santa Claus at a client's Christmas party.

JERRY SCHILL

COMPANY:

Schill Grounds Management

HEADQUARTERS:

North Ridgeville, Ohio

AGE: 41

FAMILY:

Krista Hermes, girlfriend, four children: Kortnie, Jerot, Julia and Killian.

EXTRACURRICULARS:

president of the sports committee at St. Mary's School, holiday dinners for parish, coaching, spending time outdoors, watching his children's sports.

FUN FACT:

Schill played wide receiver for the Glenville State College Pioneers in West Virginia. "Back when I was skinny," he says with a grin.

THE RIGHT REASONS

"The first word is strength. He is a very energetic, go-getter kind of guy, just not afraid to make the tough decisions when he has to, and yet carry out his business with compassion as well. You can tell he's excited about this business, and really, really wants to do well.

"I know he's been through challenging things with partners and brothers, and having gone through that type of thing myself, I know the difficulty of trying to do that. What I was amazed with was, he was really focused on what was very important for his business, the people in his business and his brother as well. In that order, his name was last.

"That is the true measure of a good man: willing to make a tough decision, but not doing it for personal reasons, but doing it for all the right reasons."

> Jim McCutcheon, owner, HighGrove Partners, Leadership Class of 2005

a

Most every Sunday night, you'll find Jerry Schill on a farm in Castalia, Ohio. It's 1,000 acres in the middle of nowhere, with a great stream for catching trout and good dirt to grow corn. He's there with his family – his girlfriend Krista and her parents, their kids, Grandma Ruth and anyone else who drops by – to laugh and be loud, cook a big dinner and catch up.

Running Schill Grounds Management and being the single parent to four very active children keeps him on the go, and these nights on the farm are their only real downtime.

"Sunday dinners are what I live for," he says.

.

Schill never considered landscaping as a career – he'd studied English in college, wanted to coach football. But eventually he switched to business, graduated and got a job as an management trainee in a chemical plant an hour away from home. But he soon learned that he couldn't sit inside all day.

"I just hated being cooped up," he says. "We grew up outdoors. Sun up to sun down, you would find us in the woods behind our house, on a ball field or camping." Schill and his brother Joe started doing some landscaping side jobs, and decided to give it a shot.



Schill's son Jerot and his friend Ray Cunningham help serve dinner.

"At the end of the day it's not about one, two or three families. It was about eighty other families. And it was the hardest decision we'd ever had to make."

And it took off. Schill Landscaping built beautiful projects all over Ohio, winning awards and growing fast.

A.

Schill and his four brothers grew up as part of a big extended family in Sheffield Lake, Ohio. He's got enough first cousins to field an entire baseball *game*.

It taught him one important lesson. "Eat fast," he says, grinning. "Or you're not eating."

But he also learned to respect the value of hard work, and to depend on the support of his family, especially two parents who encouraged their boys' energy and drive.

"You know, both our parents have always given us everything we needed, and some of what we wanted," he says. "There wasn't a lot of gray area in the house. It was either right or it was wrong, and you knew. They gave us a lot of leeway but at the end of the day, we knew exactly what was expected, where we stood, and how to conduct yourself as a gentleman."

ch

In 2009, it had become clear that Schill Landscaping couldn't survive. The three owners – brothers Jerry, Joe and Jim – had two very different visions for the company.

"It was ripping us apart. We were traditional business, and we did everything, and we're average at all of it. We made a big push to grow the maintenance, and it changed the dynamics of the company," Schill says. "And as the economy changed and the environments changed and people's passions change, so did kind of our philosophy on how to do things. And we decided that it was time to focus on what we were passionate about. The problem was we were creating too much internal competition."

Schill had two options: Do nothing, continue down the same destructive path and risk the entire company failing. Or change the company entirely, split it in two.

"You can sit and watch the walls crumble down around you," Schill says. "Or move and do something."

Schill couldn't let all those people down. He had to move. "The organization's way bigger than any one individual. Jim and I may own the company, and Joe at the time, but it's way bigger than that," he says. "At the end of the day it's not about one, two or three families. It was about eighty other families. And it was the hardest decision we'd ever had to make."

ch

The split officially completed last summer, and Schill isn't looking back. He's in a new office with his new company, and he's focused on his new competition.

"We're back in the game. It's been an up and down year for my family and the entire organization, but exhilarating at the same time," he says. "It's bittersweet, but at the end of the day it was the right move."

GIVING THANKS

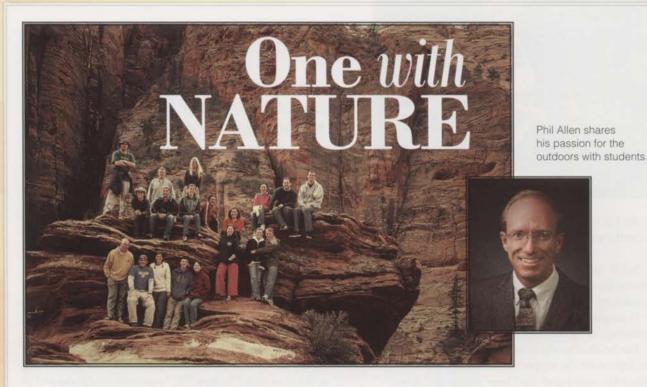
Around Thanksgiving a few years ago, Jerry Schill was looking for some volunteer opportunities for himself and his four children.

"I give the kids all the credit for it because they aggravated me one day. And they seemed to be a little ungrateful, and a little more concerned about themselves than anybody else," Schill says.

He couldn't find anything that fit, so he decided to take matters into his own hands. He reached out to some of his clients, and raised \$6,000 to serve a Thanksgiving dinner in his church basement (pictured above) for anyone in Elyria, a hard-hit industrial town on Lake Erie.

And then it took off. He and his kids now serve hundreds of hot meals on Christmas and Easter, too.

"All the proceeds are raised privately through a lot of my clients. And it's allowed us to do it every holiday," he says. "There are many businesses struggling, but they continue to give what they can for those less fortunate. It helps us realize all the things we've been blessed with."



From the forests to the trails to the classroom, Phil Allen inspires tomorrow's leaders to raise the bar for the industry. By Kristen Hampshire

Phil Allen describes a moment when he knew he had found his sweet spot as a green industry educator. It happened while he was guiding a group of students from his arboriculture class on a snowshoe hike to the largest white fir tree in the world, which happens to be close to Brigham Young University's Provo, Utah, campus.

Allen, a rugged outdoorsman who calls wild plants his friends and the rocky-desert of southern Utah his home base, can be found most weekends climbing cliffs, running miles on scenic trails and hiking the region's extreme landscapes.

"I'm teaching all my classes in rooms without windows this year – I need to have my outdoors time," says Dr. Allen, program leader for the landscape management degree at BYU.

Allen and the students began this particular hike at dusk, edging up a steep mountain trail in the cold. The conditions weren't cushy. "But there is always a lot of laughter and camaraderie," he says.

After ascending the mountain, the group arrived at a large, clear meadow a few hundred yards from the fir tree. It was dark. "The stars were bright and everyone looked up and became silent, even reverent," Allen says. "As I looked around these students – kids I have really come to love – I knew that I had the most perfect job on Earth."

During these times, Dr. Allen is Phil, says Charley Schreiber, 29, a senior at BYU. Experiencing Phil in his essence invariably occurs while communing with nature, or taking it on with wild abandon by foot, bike, kayak. And, students get to know Phil during hands-on activities, such as participating in PLANET's Student Career Days.

"He loves to teach, to help people improve," Schreiber says, "When you get to see him outside of the classroom doing what he loves, his passion is real. He's not just talk."

The stuff Allen does in his spare time (like cycling the French Pyrenees, backpacking the 217-mile John Muir Trail and going on 50-mile trail runs) involves taking the great outdoors to an awesome level. When asked how he spent a day off, he shares that he took a nine-hour hike up a mountain near an ecological restoration plot. "The view from 10,000-plus feet was spectacular," he says. Now refreshed, he was ready to return to the classroom for winter semester.

Allen brings this passion for the outdoors into the classroom where he helps to raise future leaders of this industry.

"As educators, we have to understand that this is not just about horticulture anymore," he says. "In the green industry, there is prime opportunity for people who combine horticulture with people skills and business knowledge."

For Allen, his purpose as an educator comes down to this:

"We're putting as many students as possible into an industry that we love."

GROWING LEADERS. Before returning to his alma mater to teach, Allen thought about his own teachers, and the handful that had changed his life.

"They were the ones who were super-difficult," he says. "But at the same time, they combined that challenge and rigor with the belief that I had potential."

So Allen drives students to dig deeper. "He pushes me to learn more, to understand more and be a better person when it comes to the career I'll have when I leave BYU," Schreiber says. "He wants us to be prepared."

This desire to prepare – to really give students an industry edge before they don the cap and gown – is exactly what compelled Allen to take a serious look at the BYU landscape management program and retool it. Allen draws parallels between remodeling the program to meet today's green industry demands and the book "Good to Great."

"In our own program, those were the same steps we took: determining what we could be the best at, and shedding the rest," he says. "We focused on that (accreditation) and we're passionate about the industry."

PLANET's accreditation is the only nationally recognized endorsement for universities with landscape/horticulture curricula. Only a handful of nation's schools have earned the recognition.

The designation comes as much from the school's students as its professors and administrators.

"They want to see what your (student landscape) club is like, they want to see what your students are involved in," Allen says.

What they found at BYU was a group of engaged students who get their hands dirty, work alongside campus grounds crews and learn how to succeed in the field.

That's because Allen focuses on giving students experiences that will help them make choices about their career and learn from the best. For example, Allen's arboriculture students can join the campus tree crew, led by a world-class arborist who was the International Society of Arboriculture's man of the year. "The kids become qualified to pass the ISA's certification exam, and we have 100-percent passing rate on that exam," Allen says, proud.

BYU also has the only program where students complete PLANET's landscape industry certified manager exam before graduation. "We did that as a capstone exit exam to measure their progress in the different sections of that exam," Allen says, noting that he's working to improve the passing rate each year.

Meanwhile, at BYU's business school, there is a dedicated faculty position for landscape management. They graduate with a business minor. "That is what industry professionals have told us they would like to see in kids if they are going to have a lifetime career in the landscape industry – they need a business backing," he says.

Allen's "kids" leave the university ready to work. "Even in a down economy, every one of our students who has pursued employment has found it," Allen says. In a way, this is Allen's grade. And it's outstanding.

Perhaps that's because Allen dives right into the trenches with students as they learn. "He is a master motivator," says Greg Jolley, a landscape architect professor who has watched Allen interact with students for the nine years they have worked together at BYU. "He is not afraid to go out and

"As I looked around these students – kids I have really come to love – I knew that I had the most perfect job on Earth."

get his hands dirty with the students and help them learn."

At PLANET's Student Career Days, the BYU team usually places, and in 2011 the students took first place. "Our No. 1 priority at Career Days is to network," Allen says. "We would share every bit of study material with any other school that wants it. In fact, we are working with PLANET to put that on their website. We are successful, and we have a system that works – and we are willing to share that with anyone."

Meanwhile, Allen puts his own industry knowledge to the test, challenging himself to constantly learn and grow as a professor. He took and passed the landscape contractor industry certified exam (LCIM). "Even though he has his Ph.D., he has learned the business of this industry," Jolley says, adding that he is a tireless advocate for students.

He tries to show them what the world can offer. "Most weekends, Phil is probably on a hike with a student or group of students, usually in the mountains somewhere around Utah," Jolley says.

Allen shares this same enthusiasm for nature with members of the industry. The people in this industry are what make teaching its future leaders, and working alongside its professionals, so exhilarating for Allen.

Horticulture is about plants and people. "Take the people out of it and you have botany," Allen says.

BALANCING NATURE. At Rock Canyon, an ecological restoration with a trailhead next to campus, Allen has been working to re-introduce the region's natural habitat. It's a 64-



acre expanse with rugged rock-climbing cliffs. Allen brings in volunteers to plant wildflowers.

"A lot of people have powerful changes in their lives by working in nature," he says, sharing that individuals serving court-ordered volunteer hours have found inspiration in the work. They are, in every sense, planting new seeds. "Just seeing that there is something (to do) other than what got them into trouble is a great experience," Allen says.

The Rock Canyon project was born out of some demonstration gardens Allen and colleagues at his local chapter of the Native Plant Society created. The city of Provo contacted the society and Allen suggested that a trailhead next to campus needed restoration. Eventually, an agreement formed between the city, BYU and forestry services.

It's a work in progress, always will be. "It's exciting watching the transition – it will never be completed," Allen says, noting how the support of volunteers is keeping the project in perpetual motion.

A similar ongoing pursuit takes place at home, in Allen's yard. It's about one-fifth of an acre in size, but 150 trees grow there among countless wildflowers. It's a canyon landscape that thrives on the little rain the region receives, and a little help from a run-off system he engineered for the roof. There is only one plant in Allen's front yard that requires watering.

"I never have to mow it," he says of the property. "I can prune it when I have time and tidy it up as needed." Allen's setting an example, but he keeps his preference to a showand-tell level. "I am not a fanatic about saying this is the only way to landscape," he says, adding that his goal is to find ways to balance natural resources with natural spaces.

"We need to develop approaches (to make) our landscapes really part of us, just more natural."

Because when man works against nature, as Allen can prove, the result is an environment off balance.

For instance, when Allen was hiking through a forest of

Phil Allen retooled BYU's landscape management program to better prepare students for life after school.

old spruce trees – the nine-hour excursion that preceded the semester start – he came to the end of the forest. "There was a sharp delineation of where you had forest, and then no vegetation at all," he says. "I'm sure there was at one time, so something changed dramatically at that intersection that was beyond the limits of nature."

Allen draws a lesson from this: Plants tell you their limits. We just have to listen – and show respect.

PLANTING A SEED. Allen takes these philosophies back to the laboratory as a working seed scientist. His research focuses on seed performance in adverse conditions and he's prolific in his reporting. He has published 58 scientific articles (so far).

"Every time you see a majestic oak tree ... they start with a tiny acorn," he says. "I have a passion for understanding these miraculous little entities."

Seeds have to survive in Utah and persevere through an irreversible transition from organism to growing plant. Timing is everything.

And "good" seeds can help control invasive populations that cause environmental detriment. In particular, Allen and his team have garnered a couple million dollars in funding to develop a biological control that can be applied to land-scapes to control cheatgrass, which takes over semi-desert regions where wildfires are prevalent.

"We have a fungus that basically eats the cheatgrass and we call it the 'Black Fingers of Death,'" Allen says. "It consumes seeds by putting up these fingers – fruiting structures that are black fingers and indicate the seed (of the invasive cheatgrass) has been killed."

Allen hopes to reintroduce this native plant through ecological restoration.

This desire to preserve and appreciate the world around him is a driving force for Allen. And his ability to express at BYU his spiritual relationship with the living environment is incredibly fulfilling, he says. "There is a connection there," he says, relating how the pure awe one can experience in nature suggests there is something more to all of this.

That connection is all part of the balance Allen finds when he is hiking, biking, just silently soaking in the great outdoors.

"When you are creating and managing beautiful landscapes," Allen says, "I think you are contributing to the glory of God." ••

The author is a frequent contributor to Lawn & Landscape.





Work/life balance is John Gibson's greatest personal achievement and something he constantly fine-tunes.

John Gibson

Great hunter. Yes? Fine figure of a man. Yes? Good. That is all you need to know. For now. By Carolyn LaWell

Editor's Note: John Gibson is the recipient of PLANET's 2012 Lifetime Leadership Award. He won Lawn & Landscape's Leadership Award in 2006.

his past year has been one of many great firsts. I spent four days backpacking, just me and three mules. On my honeymoon, I went hunting with my wife, Kelly, in South Africa and crossed off the first of my three A's – Alaska, Africa and Australia – from my list of dream hunting spots. Most people know I enjoy hunting, but my goal is to do it in all three A's.

I like to share what I'm passionate about. I take my 17-year-old daughter, Taylor, antelope hunting in Wyoming. I go backpacking with my 14-year-old, Marissa.

The greatest challenge, and perhaps my greatest personal achievement, is balancing the things that are important to me: my family, my work and my hobbies. I have wonderful responsibilities to my beautiful daughters and wife. I love being a leader. I enjoy time alone in the mountains.

I continue to fine tune that delicate balance and learn from the process. What fun is life without the journey and a little adventure?

John Gibson first learned about leadership on the football field. As a high school fullback and punter, his legs carried him to a football scholarship at the Colorado School of Mines and then to the semi-pro Colorado Wildcats. His coaches were aggressive and shouted orders. Gibson absorbed their examples and used them as he entered the green industry.

An electrical engineering student at the School of Mines, Gibson took a summer job performing mowing and maintenance work at Colorado Landscape Enterprises. And that summer with Tom Garber, Gibson's blood turned green. The landscaping industry had him hooked.

He didn't return to school for his senior year. Instead, he worked for Garber and learned the business and industry.

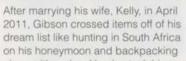
That eventually led Gibson to Swingle, Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care. Tom Tolkacz, now owner and CEO of the Denver company, hired Gibson 21 years ago. He says he remembered during the interview Gibson came off as impressive, dedicated, someone who was willing to learn. "When he starts to see something that he thinks is important, he puts energy and attention to it," Tolkacz says. "He definitely demonstrated that he would have that passion."

Dedication, enthusiasm and attention to detail are traits that few would argue don't show in Gibson's daily life. Though, over time, he learned to channel those, especially as a leader, in different ways.

A young leader, Gibson was gruff, strict and sometimes unapproachable. "He learned from experience that was not the right way to get people to do what you need them to do, or to manage or lead," says his wife, Kelly.

Gibson was a short-term motivator. He didn't ask for





alone with mules. He also took his annual hunting and backpacking trips with his daughters.

input and he didn't offer a success plan. That model once worked on the field, but it didn't translate into business.

"Early in John's career, it was, 'Tell me what I need to do, let me make the decisions, and I'll make it happen. I'm not afraid of the consequences, I'm not necessarily afraid of the failure, and I think I know what's right,'" Tolkacz says.

Gibson's ultimate professional goal was to own or lead a company. He knew that to be successful he needed to be involved in the industry and help move it forward. Garber and Tolkacz set that example for him and he followed suit.

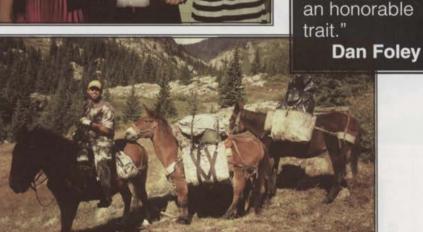
As Gibson pursued industry opportunities, they fed a desire for personal and professional development. He studied the industry and general business. He recognized different leadership techniques. He realized he needed to make changes to his own management style. And he began a concerted effort to become a leader and difference maker.

here's a little joke I like to play, sort of a rite of passage for entering the woods with me.

I weigh down my friends' backpacks with rocks. They've vowed to sleep, eat and never lose sight of their packs to avoid the dreaded rock. Still, it appears. A friend once declared he successfully made it down the mountain without me sneaking in extra weight. So I showed him where I hid it in his pack's trap door. Even my wife has fallen prey to a five-pound boulder in her pack.

Two days ago, we were sitting around the fire and my





friend said it wouldn't happen to him. Ha! Little did he know it was already hidden in his rain gear. The rain came. Perfect. He unpacked his gear and there it was, the dreaded rock.

"It's never about his leadership. I think that's

Gibson's industry involvement started as a test chair with the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado (ALCC). Early on he realized that leadership came to him naturally. Still, he knew he needed to work at it, he wanted to get better, so he sought out more industry responsibilities.

On the state level, Gibson was president of the Colorado Association of Lawn Care Professionals and, because of that position, director of GreenCO, Colorado's coalition of association. He helped develop best practices and led the industry during the state's drought in the early 2000s.

On the national level, Gibson's leadership started when Jim Campanella of Lawn Dawg asked him to sit on Professional Lawn Care Association of America's membership committee. Gibson later was named president-elect and worked on PLCAA's negotiations with Associated Landscape Contractors of America to merge the organizations into PLANET. In 2006, he led PLANET as president.

Gibson was direct – always has been. His directness was one of the greatest assets he offered the associations he worked with because it came from a place of honesty.

"He's smart, and he's politically savvy," says Kristen Fefes, executive director at ALCC. "Because he can see the political sides of discussions, he can help move things forward. He can say, 'I'm worried that some people are worried about the implications of this,' even though we haven't talked

about it yet. He can see the bigger picture."

With Gibson, there was no dancing, no confusion – just a streamlined approach to solve the issue at hand.

"He was really good at that during the negotiations, and he was really good at that as a (PLANET) board member," says Dan Foley, regional manager at The Brickman Group and the PLANET president prior to Gibson.

Gibson strived to do two things during each position he held. The first was to improve the industry and help others grow. The second was to learn a lesson that would get him to his ultimate goal – lead a business.

Fefes worked closely with Gibson in the early 2000s, during the Colorado drought, and she spoke to him about the importance of forming a consensus. "One of the most challenging things to learn when you join a board of directors and committees, is that you really do have to operate with some consensus-based thinking and decision making, and that is very difficult for people who run companies," she says. "It's not that they can't do it; it's that they don't on a daily basis."

Consensus came into play again as Gibson prepared to lead PLANET. It was still a new association trying to meet the needs of its recently merged members. Foley says he advised Gibson to communicate to members the decisions being made and the association's direction and vision.

-4-

I'm standing on the Bloukrans Bridge, peering at the gorge 708 feet below. Whatever happens next is out of my control. And I'm fine with that. I'm at peace – this is the same comfort I feel when hugging my kids, holding my wife's hand, when the sun hits my face in the wilderness.

Just relax. And jump.

I fall until the slack rope tied around my ankles tightens and shoots me back toward where I left solid ground. I'm so afraid of heights that I cringe when my daughters rock the Ferris wheel car, but Kelly and I just jumped off the highest bridge in Africa.

The bounces stopped and I'm hanging upside down, still nothing between me and that gorge below. I start to relax and think about the ropes doing the same. I know I'm in no real danger, but the feeling of slipping through relaxed ropes is an inevitable moment of paranoia bungee jumpers feel.

The straps loosen. Ha! If I'm going to die, slipping to my death is not the way I want to go. No, I want the bungee to just break. It's a much better ending to my life of adventure.

di

Gibson worked hard to transition his leadership style. He balanced his directness by softening his demeanor. He played a few jokes, showed what it meant to have fun at work.

Gibson learned from Garber, Tolkacz, Fefes, Foley, Campanella and his many other mentors. He received a degree in business management from The University of Phoenix.

Each opportunity within the industry and within Swingle was another chance for him to perfect his leadership abilities. And in 2008, he was named president of Swingle, fulfilling a nearly two-decade-long goal.

"Probably the greatest development I've seen in John is his ability to listen to and gather other people together and try to use a cooperative, communicative work style to achieve goals and objectives. That's really been the core of his growth and development," Tolkacz says. "That growth and development led to his success not only within the organization but also when he was in volunteer situations."

Tolkacz says he named Gibson president because he demonstrated a collaborative leadership style and had an "extreme dedication" to improvement and excellence.

"He loves being a leader to the team, and he loves what he can make Swingle stand for, and how he can continue to promote what Swingle does stand for," Kelly says.

What excited Gibson about running a company was the opportunity to set a vision and grow the people around him as the company reached its goals. Gibson set the direction and bar, and never apologized for his high standards. Not for Swingle, Not for the industry. Not for himself.

To him, there was no other way to succeed.

"Certain times, the leaders are driven by their own personal reasons," Foley says. "(If) you talked to John about the industry, it's always about the industry and what we can do. It's never about his leadership. I think that's an honorable trait. I'm not saying that he's not personally driven to succeed. It's just not about John Gibson."

A

A t the Colorado timberline, 11,500 feet high, the forest opens to vast land. It's just the hard soil and whatever man or animal dares to venture into the beautiful solitude. It's in this landscape that I find perfection. I find peace and freedom within myself, and nature, which is hard for anyone to search for, let alone find.

Here, for hours at a time, I've lain on a hill watching the world move around me. I've seen coyotes attack mountain lions, watched a golden eagle try to pick up a deer by its antlers. I've shot a deer only to be chased by a sow and her cubs while trying to claim my prize. Hard to believe, but all of that happened in 24 hours. And I can't wait to do it again.

Here I channel Jeremiah Johnson, that rugged mountain man played by Robert Redford, and I understand the journey and adventure mean nothing without knowing I can return home to the love and support of my wife and children.

Here, in the mountains, I have no control. Nature and animals take the lead, and I just have to live among them.

The author is an associate editor at Lawn & Landscape. She can be reached at clawell@gle.net.





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Drought defiant

Kelby Reed's portfolio of sustainable landscape designs and elaborate water feature projects show Tampa residents that going green is a beautiful thing.

After a name change – the firm started out as Reed's Landscape and Water Features – and a portfolio of green landscape designs with impressive water features, Rainscapes is a veteran in Tampa's sustainable landscape and native plant arena.

"If you can show someone what you can do and

how you can do it as opposed to just talking, it makes a world of difference," Kelby Reed, president, says of using pinnacle projects as a launch pad for his

business. Case in point: an extensive landscape job in a high-profile neighborhood traveled by local celebrities.

"I finally found a customer who loved the idea of building an entirely sustainable project," Reed says of the homeowners, who lived in a prestigious golf course neighborhood. Plus, they loved the idea of a koi pond. They wanted to capture rainwater

to use for filling and maintaining the pond. They were interested in a significant rainwater collection system.

So Reed started to make job signs explaining exactly what his crews were doing every day on that property, and that got passersby talking. "We really capitalized on where we were and what we

were doing," he says. "Instead of signs that just said 'Rainscapes,' we put out a sign that said, 'Currently collecting rainwater,' or 'Changing the land-scape environment

one step at a time."

Every week Reed created a new sign.

Neighbors called, or they picked up one of Reed's

business cards. This job helped elevate Reed's clientele, but more importantly, it gave him that key portfolio project he needed to define himself in the sus-

tainable landscape market. He had the knowledge, the skill, the creative drive – he just needed that "wow" work to show off so other homeowners could see the potential and fall in love with it.

"By showing people what we are capable of doing, they can say, 'I'd like that but maybe a smaller version' or 'I want that but two times as large,'" Reed says. "Everyone can talk, but without having a job to show people, they could just be telling a pretty story."

Reed takes his show-don't-tell philosophy to the streets in his marketing efforts. His trucks are wrapped with dramatic imagery of completed jobs. "My background is in art and architecture," Reed says, adding that before his company had those flashy jobs to show off, he created dynamic renderings that were splashed on his trucks. "Now, we are almost like a mobile portfolio," he says.



Read why Reed's clients were being ticketed for the elaborate fountains he built on their properties at www. lawnandlandscape. com/newsletters.

GENERATING A BOOM IN A BUST MARKET

With maintenance as a solid foundation, Reed was able to grow his high-end residential design/build segment by tapping into customers that had leisure dollars to burn. "Having a maintenance company did help during the time when it was tougher to make sales on larger projects," he says. "It gave us the ability to hang in there and find out what people really wanted."

Reed's theory was that people would invest in their homes. And he was right. "People couldn't sell their houses for what they just bought them for, so I wanted to capitalize on that."

Many landscape companies in the design/build segment have gone out of business, he says. "A lot of people threw in their hats and gave up."

But customers with money to burn were still prepared to invest in their own great outdoors. "People who are going to buy a good value home are going to put a substantial amount of money into it to be comfortable they want to expand their outdoor living areas and create outdoor kitchens," he says. "The jobs might not be as lavish and as elegant as in years past, but then again, most people who can afford that kind of (project) still can. It's just a matter of how you (break it down)."

From small landscape revamps to large-scale sustainable projects to simple backyard beautification jobs, Reed took every opportunity to define his firm in a tough market.

Custom built

After years of working for larger companies, Mike Haskell started his own small, specialized lawn care operation to fill the gap in customer needs.

ike Haskell, a third-generation tree care professional from central New Jersey, knows something about climbing around on wet, slippery trucks. In fact, he remembers well the spray trucks his dad and uncles rode on when he was growing up – and their dangers.

"I remember the guys climbing around on the truck, slipping and sliding," says Haskell, who owns Plant Solutions Tree & Lawn Care, a lawn and landscape company in Warren and Short Hills, N.J. "A couple of times, they slipped right off and broke their tailbones."

The old trucks were also wasteful polluters. "The chemicals they used would wash out at night and pollute the soil," he says.



So when the time came to launch his own business, Haskell looked for a truck that was safe, efficient, environmentally-friendly and had a professional image. A state-of-the-art truck could provide better service, he thought, increasing both his productivity and profits. In the end, his quest led him to custom-build a truck to meet his needs.

By working with a national manufacturer of customized spray equipment for the landscape industry, Haskell was able to create his own truck. This innovative truck carries more than 1,000 gallons of water, catches up to 300 gallons if a spill happens, contains a compost tea brewer and carries chemical and advanced biological treatments. In short, the all-in-one truck is the ultimate in efficiency and service.

"We're able to provide the highest quality product for less to our customers because of the equipment we have," says Haskell, who has 10 full-time employees and whose business is focused on high-end residential properties. "And because we're a specialist and a boutique company, our customers are willing to pay for this."

Haskell worked for several larger



Haskell also sought to create a familyowned business that utilized the same cutting-edge equipment as larger companies. "As a small business owner-operator, I was tired of the 'family business way' of doing things," he says. "I wanted our work to be a pleasant experience, and to have equipment that uses only what we need."

The Plant Solutions truck has enough hose reels to allow two or three operators to service a property at the same time. If arborists find something they didn't plan to address, then the chances are good the truck comes equipped to handle it. Plant Solutions' biological treatments and ability to conserve water also make it a forerunner in the field of sustainable landscaping. Lak

Haskell requires his employees to become trained arborists. Read why as well as other safety techniques he put in place at Plant Solutions at www. lawnandlandscape. com/newsletters.



THE RIGHT TOUCH

When Mike Haskell says that marketing is his hobby, he's serious. He never stops thinking of ways to improve his business – even when he hangs out with friends.

"I took a couple of guys out for beers after work, and one guy came up with the line, 'Saving the planet one yard at a time,'" says Haskell. "It's a little cocky but it's true. We're saving the planet by protecting lawns and using a true organic approach towards lawn care. I'm very passionate about protecting the environment."

In addition to his catchy logo, the owner of Plant Solutions Tree & Lawn Care has worked hard to develop a strong, identifiable logo that conveys the company's brand. "I believe in brand marketing," says Haskell. "You've got to have a logo that people can identify, and it needs to be consistent."

Haskell's logo is prominently displayed, including on his \$120,000 all-in-one truck. He bought the customized truck for its efficiency and environmental-friendliness, but it has also become a highly effective marketing vehicle.

"When people see our truck parked outside of a house, we get a lot of calls from that," Haskell says.

But a good marketing plan is all encompassing. Haskell also invests in direct mail campaigns to reach his target customers, which are highend residential homeowners in central New Jersey.

In late spring and summer, Haskell prints 50,000 postcards and sends them in three-week intervals to a targeted list of households. "They keep seeing the card, and eventually that pays off when people remember my name and call me," Haskell says.



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partner dupes you out of money? By Kristen Hampshire

ou don't think it will happen to you. A partner wants out and drains the checking account before filing bank-

A large contractor holds up thousands of dollars of your pay with no remorse.

A business you've been servicing for more than a decade starts another LLC and dupes you out of pay.

But you've got to consider these

worst-case scenarios. Because they do happen - to people like you. "Get an attorney who understands the type of business you are in," says Matt Caruso, president, Decra-Scape, headquartered in Sterling Heights, Mich. (Caruso was ripped off \$10,500 by a contractor who eventually settled on paying 80 cents for every dollar owed.)

And be sure legal contracts are water-

tight and leave no room for creative interpretation. The Winlands in Zanesville, Ohio, learned this the hard way when an old partner took advantage of the checkbook.

This month, Lawn & Landscape spoke with three firms who shared how those worst-case legal scenarios can play out in the real business world and how to protect yourself.

Lien law and order

Decra-Scape

Matt Caruso, president LOCATION 2 offices, Sterling Heights and Petoskey, Mich. ESTABLISHED 1990 EMPLOYEES 20 in season 2011 REVENUES \$1.4 million CUSTOMERS Southern Mich., 70% commercial, 30% residential; Northern Mich., 10% commercial, 90% residential SERVICES design/build; hardscape specialist

he 68-acre outdoor lifestyle shopping complex was complete, tenants had occupied the high-end storefronts and were paying rent. But Matt Caruso, president, Decra-Scape in Michigan, was still waiting for \$60,000 owed to him for the expansive hardscaping work his team performed.

"It was disheartening to see people walking in and out of stores knowing that the company was sitting on sixty grand of your money," he says, noting that the project totaled in the neighborhood of \$600,000 and that leftover past-due money was held up in "retention." Essentially, the company paid 90 percent of every invoice Caruso filed and held the remaining 10 percent until the end of the job.

But there was no check in the mail.

"We got to the tail end of the job, and the payments stopped all of a sudden,"

Caruso says, noting that he turned in a pay application for the job because projects of that size require draws for work performed.

Caruso had closely followed the paperwork protocol these large contracting jobs require. Before the start of the job, he sent the client his notice of commencement. And upon completing the job and not receiving that retention pay, he filed a claim on the lien. "Once your last day your labor has touched the ground is over, and after 90 days passes, if you don't put a claim in on your lien when you haven't been paid in full, you start to get into some muddy waters," he says.

Lien laws can get tricky, and Caruso emphasizes that landscape companies that work on large projects like this one with multiple contractor-players involved should "watch their backs"

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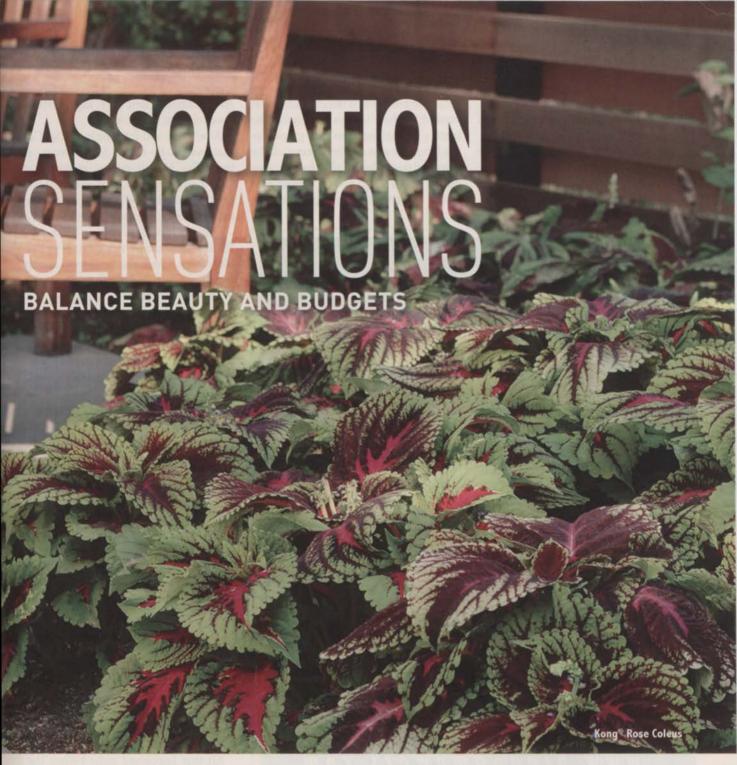
1 rules and requirements that agree to abide by in order to use a general and special arrangement sions, requirements, rules, specif standards that form an integr agreement or contract

QUICK TIPS

Learn lien law. And if you aren't comfortable with the legalities of a large contracting job, be sure to consult with legal counsel and do your homework. A minor paperwork oversight can really backfire.

Hire someone in the know. Talk to attorneys who understand the industry and have experience working with clients in your particular field.

Keep tabs on A.R. Don't allow accounts receivable to age without proper follow-up. In Caruso's case with this large contractor client, the key was to file paperwork on time and let the client know he was well-versed on the lien law process. "If you understand and follow the (lien) filing process, you're ahead of a lot of guys and in a good position to eventually get paid," he says.



The rise in Home Owners Associations is a great opportunity for new business. But it also means more discerning decision makers and tougher competition. See how to win kudos this year and repeat business the next.

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and understand lien law. Otherwise, your company could get duped out of hard-earned pay.

"From a contractual standpoint, (the client) was likely hoping that we were not privy to (the law) and they were hoping to take advantage of us," Caruso says.

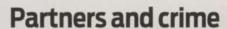
Caruso confronted the client and was invited to their offices to discuss the matter. "I walked into this grandiose conference room and here come all the suits and ties trying to offer me 25 cents on the dollar to go away," Caruso says of the paltry settlement proposition.

He declined. Then he sought further counsel from his attorney.

After back-and-forth negotiating, Caruso eventually settled for 80 cents on the dollar. His attorney suggested that after a yearlong wait, Caruso accept the offer. Otherwise, he'd end up spending that money on attorney's fees in court.

Caruso lost \$10,500 on that job. "That's not chump change," he says. But ultimately, given the economic slump and slow pay trend of other clients, he felt he had no choice but to settle.

Lien laws are there to secure a debt the property owner owes to another person – in this case, Caruso. They're a protection, but only if you use them. "I had all my i's dotted and t's crossed, which is why I got paid 80 cents on the dollar eventually," Caruso says.



Winland Complete
Landscaping Services

R.D. and Stephanie Winland, partners/ owners LOCATION Zanesville, Ohio ESTABLISHED 1996 EMPLOYEES 20 in season 2011 REVENUES \$925,000 CUSTOMERS 50% commercial; 50% residential SERVICES maintenance, design/build, irrigation, snow removal

When the partner that R.D. Winland started his first landscape company with back in college wanted out, what seemed an amicable request fast rolled into a drained checking account, bankruptcy and three years of stress.

All this happened right before the economy really took a dip.

"I had first rights to buy him out, or we could find someone else to buy him out 50/50," R.D. Winland says of the somewhat loose partnership agreement that was drawn up between him and his buddy. Winland was the field man, managing operations and delivering the service. His partner was the sales leader who also managed the books.

Before giving the partner an offer,



The lesson learned, Winland says, is to think twice before you bring on a partner.

Winland figured out the worth of the company minus its debt. Then, he put an offer on the table. "The next thing I know, I'm being sued," Winland says. But worse, in the midst of meeting with an attorney to deal with the lawsuit, the partner drained the checking account. There were no check-signing limitations requiring both partners signatures in their casual partnership agreement.

That was a big mistake. Winland filed a countersuit that persisted for six months before the partner filed personal bankruptcy. So the case was essentially dropped because the bank takes precedence in situations like this. "We sat there for almost two and a half years waiting for the bankruptcy to go through court, and bank trustees, who oversee the procedure, came to us to see if he could get some assets out of the business," Winland says.

The trustees determined that the partner indeed had ownership in the company. But they never asked the Winlands to give up any assets. Meanwhile, the partnership was still intact legally. And that is still the case today. "We filed for a dissolution instead of going back to sue him for what he stole," Winland says. That process is in the works.

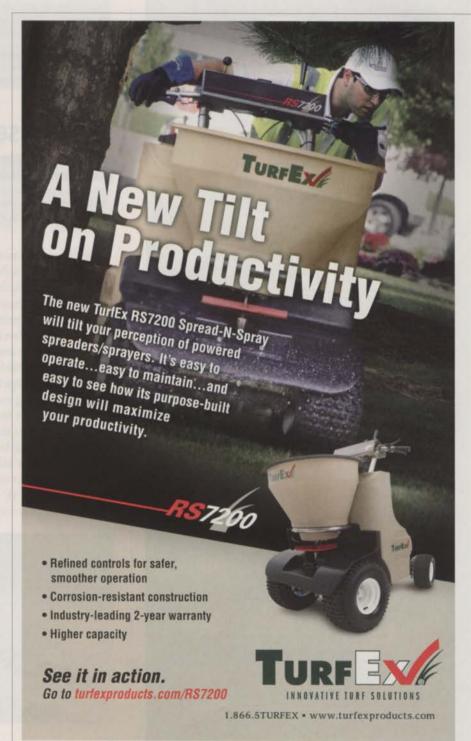
In the meantime, Winland faced a credit lock-up when he approached banks to get working capital because of the partner's bankruptcy state. "No one wants to allow you to have a line of credit to purchase materials that you need to do long-term projects," Winland says.

So Winland started a new business with his wife, Stephanie, as partner. They realigned their marketing by giving the company a new name but keeping the logo similar to the old one. "We want people to identify with the good things we have done in the past," Stepha-

nie Winland says. "We are in a small town, so reputation is everything."

The Winlands communicated with customers about the name change, leaving the partnership battle out of it. "We put a letter out to customers and vendors saying we are realigning our business and marketing efforts to truly describe our line of work (with a new name), and it's a positive direction for the company," she says.

The lesson learned, Winland says, is to think twice before you bring on a partner.







OUICK TIPS

Invest in advisers. Think twice before hiring even a well-meaning friend or family member as an accountant or attorney. Instead, bring on the best professional for the job. Get referrals and interview several professionals before making a decision.

Get a tight agreement. Casual agreements can result in financial catastrophe if a worst-case scenario comes true. Be sure legal agreements address all of the what-ifs. The Winlands wished they hadn't hired an attorney that wove loose ends into the partnership agreement. "What if a partner dies? What if a partner wants out? What if a partner commits a crime? What happens?" Stephanie says.

Think twice about partnering. Do you really want to partner, and why? "Be sure everyone is on the same page, because you can't trust anyone," R.D. Winland says.

Client use and abuse

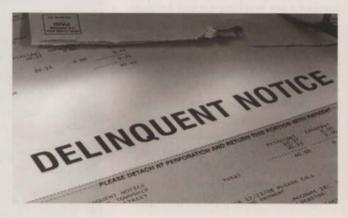
Lawn Managers West

Linda Zweifel, president LOCATION St. Louis ESTABLISHED 1989 EMPLOYEES 20 in season 2011 REVENUES \$2 million CUSTOMERS 80% residential; 20% commercial SERVICES lawn care

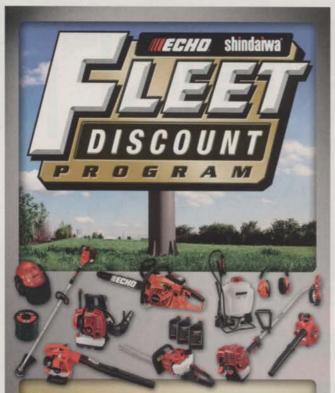
For 15 years, Lawn Managers in St. Louis, had served as the lawn care subcontractor for a large maintenance firm in town – a several-million dollar outfit that only focused on landscape maintenance. The big firm sold lawn care services to its customers, turned the business over to Lawn Managers and paid Linda Zweifel and her then-partner directly. That business generally amounted to \$200,000 in commercial work each year for Zweifel.

Last year, the large firm seemed to be growing exponentially. "They kept getting more and more accounts and having us bid on them and start to service them," Zweifel says. "I thought it was strange that they were taking on so much work. Then, they started falling behind in payments."

Lawn Managers' 60-day payment policy went by the wayside. The big firm hadn't cut a check for 120 days. Zweifel wanted to stop doing the work – better to lay off a couple of employees than put the business in financial jeopardy. But her partner







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wanted to keep their guys busy. They continued to do more work, driving the bill owed to them up to \$150,000.

Zweifel placed phone calls, doing her best to collect. "They said, 'We're having a rough time, we'll get it to you next year," Zweifel says. But by the end of the seven-month season, Lawn Managers was owed \$185,000. The big firm would send scant payments of \$3,000 here and there, barely chipping away at the balance. Today, Lawn Managers is out \$122,000 and that doesn't count operating costs. Plus, because Lawn Managers runs the business on a cash accounting basis, it couldn't claim the \$122,000 as a loss on their tax returns.

Meanwhile, the big firm had started another LLC, and Zweifel believes its unusual surge in business was an effort to falsely build up revenues in order to eventually sell to a large national company. "They used us for all of their chemical apps, knowing they weren't going to pay, and they made it look like they had so much revenue going through them and capital to back it up," Zweifel says.

That big firm is still in business. Zweifel sees the trucks on the road - their old name and logo were removed, but she can see where the signage was stripped from the vehicles. "They are still out there working, even though they ripped us off for \$122,000," she says, fuming.

Lawn Managers took the issue to court and found 10 other companies waiting in line to get their money, too. "There is nothing we can do to retrieve it," Zweifel says of the money.

Zweifel says the LLC and fast growth were red flags, and Lawn Managers should never have allowed a large customer to run such a big balance. She says there are really no legal repercussions, and so now the focus is on driving the core business, not being a subcontractor for someone else. Lawn Managers is embarking on a website project to enhance its Internet marketing.

The end lesson: Don't get brushed off by the bigger guy, she says. "A lot of businesses have working relationships with other companies and think, 'Well, they always paid us in the past. They will pay us," Zweifel adds. L&L

The author is a frequent contributor to Lawn & Landscape.

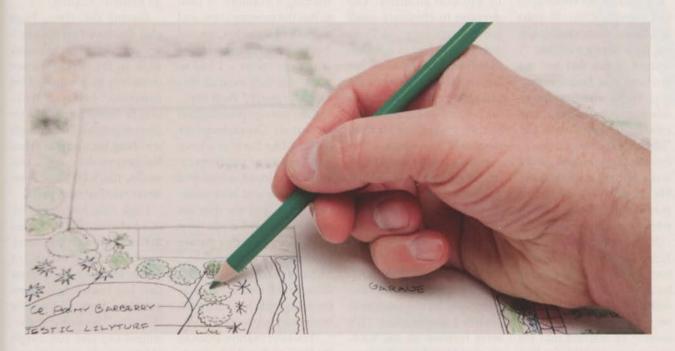
QUICK TIPS

Watch account aging. "Never let your accounts get older than 90 days," Zweifel says. And be sure to follow up early and often with customers who are not abiding to agreed-upon pay terms. If a customer stops paying, stop working, she says.

Watch for red flags. When the large firm started a separate LLC, Zweifel says she should have known something unethical could be going on. And when the company seemed to be growing at an unusually fast pace, she wishes she had investigated why and how.

Subcontract with care. If you serve as a subcontractor for larger landscape firms, consider how much revenue you bring in for each of these clients. And be sure to spread your risk - don't allow your business to be dependent on work being siphoned to you by one firm.





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COVER STORY

\ /hen Todd Pugh founded Todd's Enviroscapes in Louisville, Ohio, 16 years ago, he was consciously building on a family tradition. "I started in the dirt and my business was homegrown," says Pugh, who first began mowing lawns for extra money when he was 14 years old. "My grandparents were successful dairy farmers, and I was raised on a hobby farm. My parents always enjoyed gardening, so I guess that is where I got my interest."

In 2011, Enviroscapes had 125 employees, \$8.5 million in revenue and three locations. Yet when Pugh embarked on his journey to become a successful business owner, he learned that his greatest asset could also be a liability. "I had to change my mindset from being a technician to a business owner," he says. "I was a right-brained entrepreneur that said 'OK, let's do it,' and we did it, but we weren't focused."

Four years ago, Pugh decided to focus on larger clients that brought in a minimum of \$10,000 annually. The decision to eliminate small jobs wasn't easy. As Pugh puts it, "We had to tell Mrs. Jones we couldn't mow her lawn anymore." Yet while the change eliminated more than 70 percent of Enviroscapes' clients, it cost less than 20 percent of its revenue.

Pugh's unwavering focus on his goals is now yielding impressive results, as shedding smaller clients has made Enviroscapes more effective, efficient – and profitable.

CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT.

When Pugh first started Enviroscapes, he was too busy to analyze his operations. "We were focused on the landscape side and not the business side," he says. "About 80 percent of our business was residential, and we were doing \$20-a-week cuts. That's a tough business model – there are a lot of sites to visit and clients to keep happy for not much money per account"

It was also challenging to

manage employees while running a business. "I used to run the mowing crew, and then all of a sudden, we had five mowing crews and three landscape crews – I had to make sure they were all running efficiently," Pugh says.

After seeing a presentation by former Groundmasters owner Mike Rorie at a lawn and landscape conference, Pugh developed a business plan. "Once you hear someone speak, and see they are actually doing what you want to, then there is this certain level of, 'This is achievable." Then he reached out to consultants and took a no-holdsbarred approach to paring his business down to essentials.

"You have to know when to flip the switch and take things to the next level," Pugh says. "It's about focusing on continuous improvement, and being good at what you do."

FROM LABOR TO OPERATIONS.

By focusing on operations, efficiency and innovation over several years, Pugh was able to grow Enviroscapes into a \$5 million company.

During this time, Pugh also developed an approach toward pricing that he's stuck with to this day. "We see ourselves as a value-added company," he says. "We're not the lowest priced, but we are competitive. Some people are cheap because that's their business model – and if that works, that's OK. But I was never satisfied with that."

Pugh also began spending between \$40,000 and \$60,000 annually on consultants. "It's a lot of money, but you're bringing in someone that has knowledge of best practices from all over the industry," he says. "A consultant can give you insight about your business in two days that could take you 10 years to learn on your own."

Enviroscapes also continued to focus on the operations side of the business, including using technology and mechanization to make the company more efficient. In 1998, when a consultant

Enviroscapes boosted its profitability by firing 70 percent of its clients.



and high-end landscape work. It also rebranded to stand out from its competition.

By Lee Chilcote

UNDERSTAND YOUR LIMITATIONS

Pugh spends between \$40,000 and \$60,000 in consultant fees every year. Although he says that the investment is worth it, he acknowledges that implementing their advice is not always easy.

"Things are always traveling 100 miles an hour, so you really have to be a mechanic and fix the bus while it's moving," he says.

Pugh hires consultants whose strengths balance out his weaknesses. Examples of areas that he's focused on with his outside consultants include implementing financial controls within his company, tracking estimated versus actual hours, understanding how to train employees and communicating information to employees in the field.

Pugh hasn't always taken his consultants' advice. In fact, when he first began hiring outside experts, he had trouble finding time to follow their recommendations.

"After the third or fourth year of having lots of information, but not being able to execute the changes that were recommended, we pinpointed areas and really focused on them," he says, "If you hire consultants, you really need to make a commitment."

Pugh cautions business owners not to treat consultants as a panacea that will fix their every problem. "People hire consultants as if they're the end all and be all, but they're really just a source of information," he says. "It's up to the owner to implement change."

Pugh speaks at industry events about how his company narrowed its customer focus, rebranded and honed in on innovation. For more lessons from Pugh and a video interview, visit www.lawnandlandscape.com.

advised him not to use labor for work that could easily be mechanized, Pugh partnered with a local fabrication shop and developed, and now sells, the Mulch Mule, a machine that moves bulk materials and saves labor.

Although Pugh says that the industry is slow to adapt to new technology, he sees the future lies in becoming leaner and more efficient. "There is more competition and the construction market is not growing right now, so companies have to adapt and become more efficient or they will become extinct."

Being smart with new technology does not necessarily mean being the first to use it, Pugh cautions. "I always say that the cutting edge is the bloody edge – let someone else get bloody and we'll come in behind them," he says. "We're quick but we're not fast."

THE NEXT LEVEL. By 2007, Pugh had grown Enviroscapes into a major player in Northeast Ohio, but he wasn't satisfied. He had a great team of younger managers who wanted opportunities to continue to grow with Enviroscapes. "I had to either continue to grow the business or downsize," he says. To take things to the next level, he needed to do something that seemed counterintuitive – he had to shed customers.

"We had so much work

coming at us, and so during the winter of 2008 we started going through every customer that was in our database," Pugh says. "We looked at profitability, routing, size of contract, PIB (pain in butt) factor, and how the client fit into our current model and asked ourselves, 'Do they fit as an Enviroscapes client going forward?"

66 Even in a bad economy, a bad account is a bad account.

Pugh realized that Enviroscapes could become more profitable by shedding clients that did not fit. His challenge, to put it mildly, was to politely get rid of more than 70 percent of his customers. "When we did our analysis, we learned that these customers that did not fit our model. mostly small customers, were less than 15 percent of our revenue," he says. "We asked ourselves, 'Can we afford to give up a couple hundred grand worth of work?' We ultimately decided we could."

Fortunately, Pugh had an employee that was ready to start a business of his own, and Pugh sold Enviroscapes' smaller clients that no longer fit the business model.

Although Enviroscapes could have greater annual revenues if it accepted smaller customers, Pugh says the company's focus has made it more profitable. By developing loyalty and deeper relationships with his clients, the relationship is a win-win.

"We began focusing on the bigger commercial sites - doing homeowners associations, colleges and universities and different kinds of public sector work," says Pugh. "Our goal is to have fewer customers, but to do more work for them and offer the best customer service in the industry."

It hasn't always been easy to stay focused. "In the summer of 2009, we started to get slow, and one of our employees said, 'Maybe we should go back to the types of jobs that we used to do," Pugh says. "We had to remind ourselves that the reason we sold off some of our client base was we could not take care of the clients the Enviroscapes way. We stayed focus and within a short period of time, we had plenty of the 'right' work."

As Enviroscapes enters the next phase of its growth, Pugh has vowed to become even more focused. Next year, the company will again "clean the bottom of our accounts off," he says. "Even in a bad economy, a bad account is a bad account."

Pugh is proud that 70 percent of Enviroscapes' work is maintenance, while only 30 percent is landscape installation. To ensure success moving forward, Pugh doesn't want the company to have all of its eggs in one basket. "We've replaced unpredictable landscape work with predictable maintenance work," he says.

"The future of the industry is in knowing your customer better than they know themselves," Pugh adds. "If you do this, then you'll have raving fans that want to help you. Don't take your eye off the ball – and embrace building relationships." Lal

The author is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.



BY CHUCK BOWEN

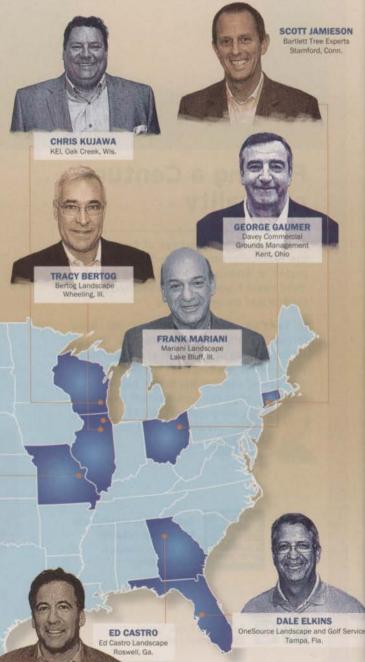
POWER PLAYERS The best and brightest in the industry.

ast October, Lawn & Landscape sat down with owners and executives from top companies across the country to get a pulse on the opportunities and challenges facing the industry in 2012. We talked sales, pricing, closing contracts, labor and regulations.

All year Lawn & Landscape will be running excerpts of that conversation. Here, we pick up where the conversation left off in our February issue - competing with lowballers and closing contracts.

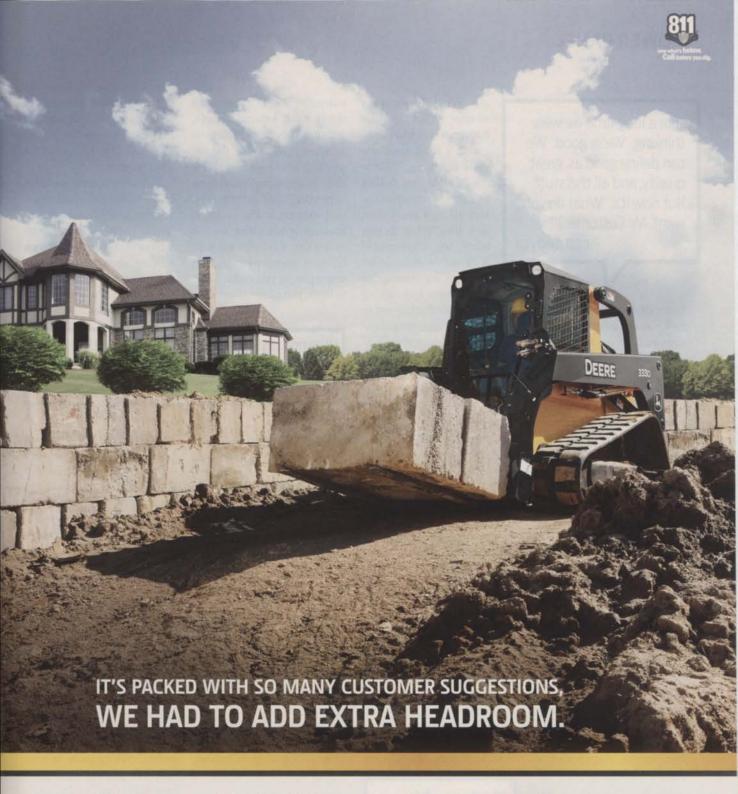
Frank Mariani: I'm not smart enough to compete on that low-cost basis - I just don't know how to crack that nut. But, some big companies have figured that out, and God bless them. I just don't play in that arena.

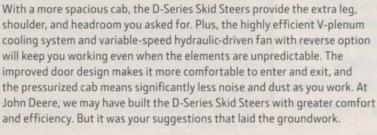
So we all have to find out what we do well. And here again, I think at these types of events, there needs to be

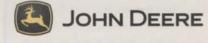


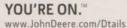
BOB GROVER Pacific Landscape Manag Hillsboro, Ore.

> MAURICE DOWELL Chesterfield, Mo.









"For a long time we were thinking, 'We're good.' We can define good as, great quality, and all this stuff. But now it's, 'What do you want, Mr. Customer?'"

- BOB GROVER

more discussion about how to figure out what's your mission and ... how do you take advantage of your particular segment of the industry? Instead of focusing on, "This is the low price provider, and if you want to play, you have to play in that." I just think that it shows how unsophisticated we are as an industry when all you talk about is, "bottom line, bottom line,"

The problem with our country right now is that there's too many McDonald's, there's too many Walmarts, there's too many Home Depots, too many landscapers ... there's too much of everything.

In the same token, there are so many dollars being spent in those segments, and all we want is a piece of that. And if we can figure out how to be smarter than our competitors, there's a lot of dollars out there.

Bob Grover: Some of the stuff that we've worked on is that pricing is down and you have to figure out how to do it cheaper, constantly inventing new ways to improve our productivity. But one of the things is, "What are we good at? What do we want to sell? What does the customer want to buy?"

For a long time we were thinking, "We're good." We can define good as, great quality, and all this stuff. But now it's, "What do you want, Mr. Customer?" And we've done a lot of work on metrics of our surveys and talking

to clients. And what we're finding out is that what's important to us isn't always as important to our customers.

Trying to define the service that we want to provide has to be in line with what they want. We get really proud about quality, and we're pulling stuff out of our services and people aren't even noticing it.

What people want is for us to manage the property. They don't have the staff; commercial property owners are managing twice the number of properties. They want a low-cost offer. But really, they want somebody that's going to take their landscape dollars, and manage it throughout the year and never have to call us.

Chris Kujawa: Our property managers that we're working for used to manage five or six buildings. Now they're

"It takes a while to figure out that we're not on an even playing field."

- GEORGE GAUMER

managing 12, 13. They can't do it with knuckleheads, because they have to answer to whomever. Now the reporting is even more. Now they're spending more time reporting and rating this, and looking at the budgets, instead of watching what's going on. And you have to babysit some people, but some people you don't. Time is tight, but talent is tighter.

(2011) they were projected to go up by 10 percent, and last I checked it was already up 11 percent by the end of the third quarter.

So, our customers are being faced with real challenges. They're not just hammering landscapers, they're hammering everybody: plumbers, heating, everything.

Everybody is having to nip it down. We really had a struggle for awhile dealing

"I'm not smart enough to compete on that lowcost basis — I just don't know how to crack that nut." — FRANK MARIANI

L&L: George you play in that space. What do you think?

George Gaumer: It's a little different when you're dealing with different markets and different people.

Some of the markets out there, as Dale well knows, are a little more price sensitive, they're all price sensitive, but Florida has always been very tight.

Dale Elkins: But now they're looking deeper and cutting deeper due to the external pressures from, again, from personal income of people going away, from foreclosures, people not paying their dues, it goes on and on and on.

GG: All of the customers out there, or a majority of them, are dealing with that situation; the vacancy rates have never been higher. They were projected to be 17 or 18 percent but ended up being 20 percent in 2010. This year

with the fact that somebody hands you a scope of work – and you want to bid that scope of work, you want to play above the board – and you bid the scope of work, and the job goes for 75 percent of your bidding number. It takes awhile to figure out that we're not on an even playing field.

It's really hard to explain to young managers, who you've brought along and cultured to do things right, to say to them, "Don't worry about the scope, just figure out what you can do cheap." That's just the way that they hear it.

They say, "You told me before, 'We're going to take care of our customers' and now it's OK not to do that?"

That's a really hard transition to make when you're dealing with groups of managers of various levels of expertise and skill. LaL

The author is editor and associate publisher of Lawn & Landscape. He can be reached at chowen@gie.net.

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Here are five sentences that could destroy your business. By Allan Davis

and around long enough in the landscape industry and you will pick out destructive behavior in the comments you hear people make. The sentiments behind these comments become the building blocks of the culture that will develop. Here are five sentences that, if ever spoken, could destroy a company culture and eventually the company itself.

"That sounds like a negative comment to me."

A meeting was held with a group of managers of a large landscape maintenance firm, where a question was posed to the leader questioning a new initiative. "That sounds like a negative comment to me," was the response.

It was at that moment that everyone learned that you do not question or criticize anything that the leadership does.

All communication upwards became sanitized and nothing constructive was communicated again. There was a feeling that any comments made that might in any way be interpreted as negative could very well cost someone their job. This created

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COMPANY CULTURE

what has been called a "yes men" culture.

Every initiative proposed by the leaders of the company was greeted by "yes men," who were afraid to report bad news and would always shake their heads in agreement no matter how bad the idea was.

If you are in a leadership position in a company, why wouldn't you want creative and talented people in your organization help you craft plans, policies and initia-

Why wouldn't you want a process where discussion, debate and the free flow of ideas leads you to the best possible result?

You don't have to be a large

corporate entity to develop a "yes men" culture. Small companies are also susceptible to this type of negative practice. If you are a leader in your company, encourage open discussion, critique and sharing of opinions good and bad.

If you are not thanking people for bringing you bad news or sharing criticism, you do not have a sustainable business.

"This office is where it all happens."

Many important tasks take place in the office, the shop, the facility, or wherever you run your business.

What must never be forgot-

ten is that in the landscape industry, the most important functions take place in the field, on the customers' sites.

Functions such as financial management, marketing, sales, human resources and others are important, but should only exist to support the delivery of quality service to the client.

All efforts and resources should be used for improvement of front line activities first, and then used for supporting functions as economically as possible. If your organization does not respect the fact that your front line employees are the ones driving the business, then do not have a sustainable business.

"Let's check the financials first.

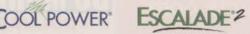
A truly successful landscape business manages by the numbers. Controlling labor is critical. Some firms consider nothing but the numbers in the decision making process.

There is constant pressure placed on field managers from above to control costs, which trains them to skimp on service or reject client's requests because they blindly follow hour or financial bud-

A \$70,000 client requested extra flats of annuals to fill out a sign bed, only to be told that they already received the exact amount in the contract.

A \$150,000 client request-









ed a few overgrown shrubs pruned from in front of a window due to safety concerns, only to be told that there are no pruning hours budgeted for that month.

If your organization cannot consider customer service in the decision making process, you do not have a sustainable business.

"I had to walk the crew around the site and point out what needed to be done."

If you manage people, and insist on interfering in the performance of their job, they will never take complete accountability for that job and grow into the leader you need them to be.

It is a simple formula that truly works.

Find the right person for the job; give them the tools to perform the job; and get out of the way and let them perform the job.

This doesn't imply that you should not get involved.

The key is to manage based on the results they achieve and not through the process they employ.

If you don't already have one, make an organizational chart.

Take this chart and commit to having everyone manage only their direct reports.

This means that everyone

only manages those people who have direct lines to them on the organizational chart.

Conversely, everyone reports only to the individual directly above them on the organizational chart and nobody else.

In doing this, everyone who has a responsibility for someone else can take ownership over their job and be judged by the results of their team without interference from others.

If your organization has managers and leaders who micro-manage, and therefore relieve others of the responsibility and accountability of their jobs, you do not have a sustainable business.

"I don't really pay too much attention to numbers."

It is critical that the leadership has a financial system that is comprehensive and gives vital information that allows for proper decision making.

This means an estimating system, a budgeting system, a real time profit and loss reporting system and a job costing system, which will illustrate your costs and help you create a sustainable business.

The author is a freelance writer with 35 years of experience in the commercial landscape maintenance industry. He can be reached at adavis@glemedia.com



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By William J. Lynott

Thinking of leaving your bank?

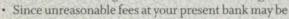
HERE ARE TIPS ON HOW TO MAKE THE RIGHT MOVE EASIER.

urious public reaction to the announcement of oppressive new debit-card fees caused some banks to back off in a hurry, but you may rest assured that banks will continue to fish around for more sneaky ways to part you and your business from your money - and they've already discovered some good ones.

If you've been thinking about parting ways with your bank, your first job is to make sure that you're not going from the frying pan into the fire. Not every bank will represent a big improvement over the policies of your present bank, so you need to do your homework by thoroughly investigating the policies and fees of the new bank you are considering.

Here are some questions you should ask and consider when making a switch:

· Is your new bank on sound financial ground? Log on to www.bankrate.com for information. Scroll down to "Safe & Sound Ratings" for Bankrates' star rating.





one of the most compelling reasons to consider a change, you should ask for a complete list of bank fees.

- · Many banks are working to attract small business owners with special offers. Ask about low-fee or no-fee business checking accounts or other offers that may be attractive to you.
- · Does your new bank offer online banking and is its website intuitive and easy to use?
- · How long will the bank hold new deposits before making the money available to you for withdrawal?
- · Is the use of its ATMs free or will you pay a charge each time you use one?

- · Will management personnel be available to you if you have difficult questions or an issue that needs attention?
- · How easy will it be to gain access to upper management for a resolution should you have a serious issue?
- · Ask among friends and associates who may be customers of the new bank you are considering. The most dependable advertising of all is word of mouth from satisfied customers.

While you can do much of your research online, there's no substitute for personal contact. A visit with the branch manager of the bank you're considering will give

you the opportunity to get a feel for whether or not the chemistry will be right for you.

Once you've satisfied yourself that the time has come to make a move and you've found the bank that you feel will make it all worthwhile, these tips will help to make a dicey job a lot easier:

Start by examining at least two recent bank statements to make a written list of any direct deposits and recurring payments that are automatically being credited or debited to your current account. These could include such things as paychecks, Social Security deposits, automatic utility payments or deposits

66 Many banks are working to attract small business owners with special offers.

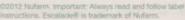
from Treasury Direct. This important first step is necessary for a smooth and painless transition to your new bank.

Next, open an account at your new bank. Then contact every company on the above list. Ask them to switch their transactions to your new bank. In order to do this, you'll need to provide them with the new bank's routing number and your new account number so they can begin making deposits and debits to the correct account.





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SWITCHING BANKS

Ask them how long it will take to make the change.

You can find the new bank's routing number and your checking account number within the string of numbers located at the bottom of one of your new checks. The numbers at the bottom of your check include a nine-digit bank routing number, your account number and the check number.

The nine-number string at the bottom left of your check is your bank routing number. This number is always nine digits long. Your account number will be to the immediate right of the bank routing number. The third set of numbers will be the check number, which you can verify by comparing with the number of the check.

If all of this seems a bit daunting, check with the bank you're considering to see if they provide a "switch kit." Switch kits provided by some banks make it easy to give your new bank the info it needs to make the switches so that you don't have to. Chances are that your new bank will have other help available for every step throughout this process so be sure to ask.

For some, this whole business may sound like too much work. If that's you, check with www.bankswitcher.com. For a small fee, this firm will help you untangle yourself from all this detail by providing you with step-by-step instructions, phone numbers, website addresses and forms to switch all of your automated transactions.

Regardless of how you proceed in the switching process, it's important to keep both accounts open until you're sure everything has been switched over and the entries are showing up on your new bank statement. Some of the firms making automatic credits and debits will be much slower than others in making the switch.

As you have gathered by now, if your present account doesn't involve any automatic credits or debits from outside firms, the job of switching over will be greatly simplified.

Once you've confirmed that all of the previous credits and debits, if any, are appearing on your new bank statement, and that all checks have been cleared from your old account, your work is done

Switching banks in this technological age has become a sharp pain in the neck. But, if you do switch, you'll at least have the satisfaction of knowing that you didn't just stand by while the powersthat-be in your old bank cooked up new ways to part you from your money. Lal.

The author is a freelance writer based in Abington, Pa. He has expertise in small-business finance.



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Le Petit Chalet

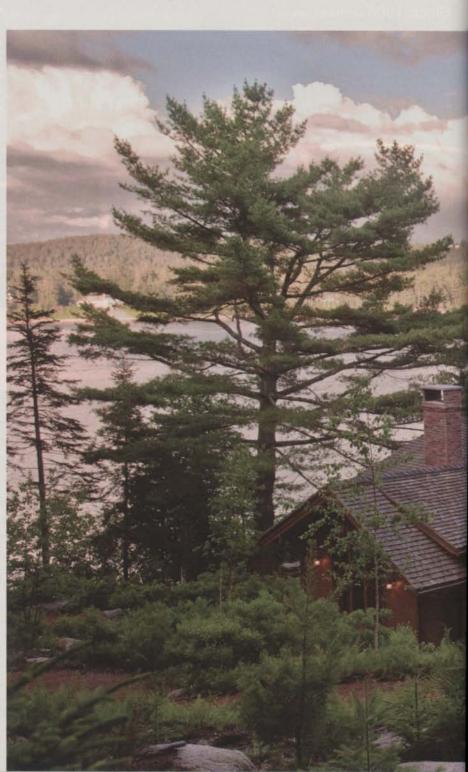
Southwest Harbor, Maine

his is the first installment of Designer's Notebook, a series that brings you great photos of high-end landscape designs from across the country, and commentary from respected designers on the details that make it stand out.

We chose this coastal Maine installation for a few reasons. It's a whole-sale rehab of a storm-damaged site. It required tremendous engineering to withstand the amount of water the mountain sees every season. And it's a sustainable and thoughtful approach to its environment. – Chuck Bowen







The site is steeply sloped, at the base of Flying Mountain, near Acadia National Park on Mount Desert Island. A bad storm and house construction had left the property raw and destroyed.

We started in June. During the five-month construction period, we lived on the property. What we saw was beyond any of our possible imaginations: two solid months of record rainfall. There was more than one night that James was outside at two or three in the morning, in a thunderstorm, digging trenches to redirect water away from the house.

(Cunningham) consulted with an engineer and the systems got beefed up significantly. If we hadn't been living on site, I am not sure that any of us would have really understood how much water moved through that hillside. – James Barrett and Susanna Jewell, Gardenform Landscape Construction, Deerfield, Mass.





DESIGNER'S NOTEBOOK

T his project creates a true sense of place through excellent design and craftsmanship. It is hard to imagine that this hillside was at one time devastated, for the home appears to truly belong to the site.

The strongly unifying principle of simplicity ties all of the photos together: stone, plant and wood, shown in grays, greens and browns. Only a lone area of Annabelle hydrangeas peaks out of the sea of naturally arranged native greens.

The many appearances of stone show how Cunningham deftly displayed the dynamic properties of a material. The Maine granite seems to naturally break through the verdant cover in instances of pavement, wall, sitting spots, and even an area of stepping stone made entirely of carefully arranged small stones.

Simple, strong and true. The photo of a red fox resting on the lawn speaks volumes on how well this design naturally fits into its setting. Wonderful project. – *Bill Healy*, *APLD*





The stone work at Le Petit Chalet proves God is in the details. The craftsmanship and creative details yield hardscape elements that are both beautiful and functional. My favorites are the retaining wall bench, the stone under the lawn table and the stone firewood holder.

The bench beckons one to sit and enjoy the peaceful setting of ferns entering the woods. The stone is old and weathered, giving a sense the bench has been there for hundreds of years. This single element expands the garden's use.

Likewise, the stone laid out like an area rug beneath a table set on a soft green lawn appears whimsical and beckons one to sit, relax and soak up the scenery.

The Stonehenge-like slabs of rock holding firewood are a perfect example of form and function. This landscape element verges on contemporary yet stops short because the slabs aren't cut to match. Brilliant! – Kathy Snyder Hubner, APLD TCNP

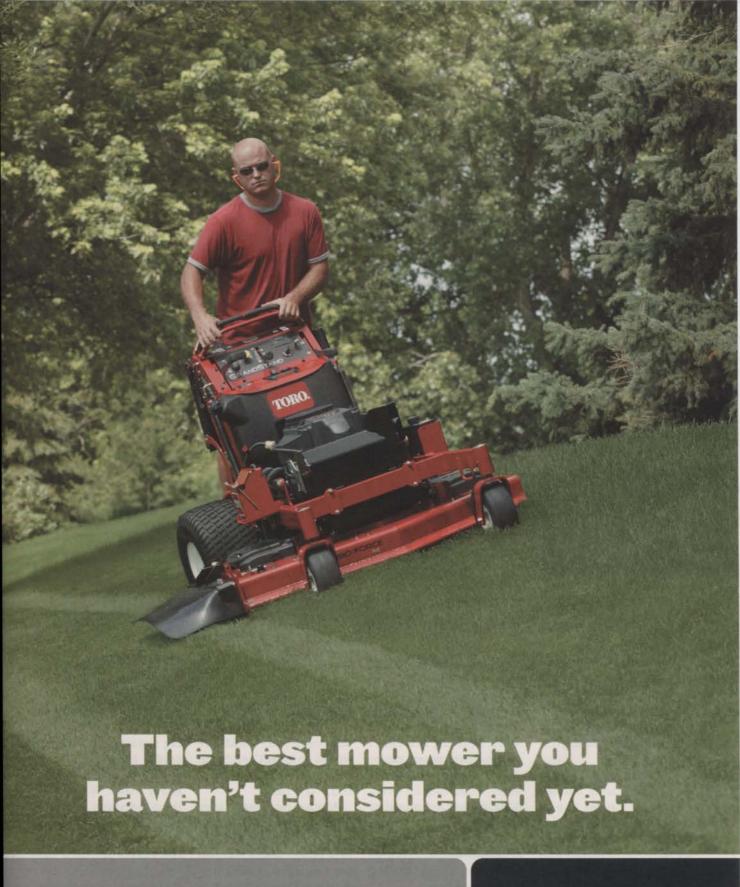


The biggest challenge to any landscape designer is to create a garden that emulates a natural environment. With his deep knowledge of the native plant material and his sensitivity to the site contour, Cunningham was able to create an illusion that the house had been sited in a clearing in the woods.

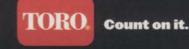
To see the before and after images of this project, is to believe in the healing power of the land when someone decides to do the correct site remediation, and select the correct plant material.

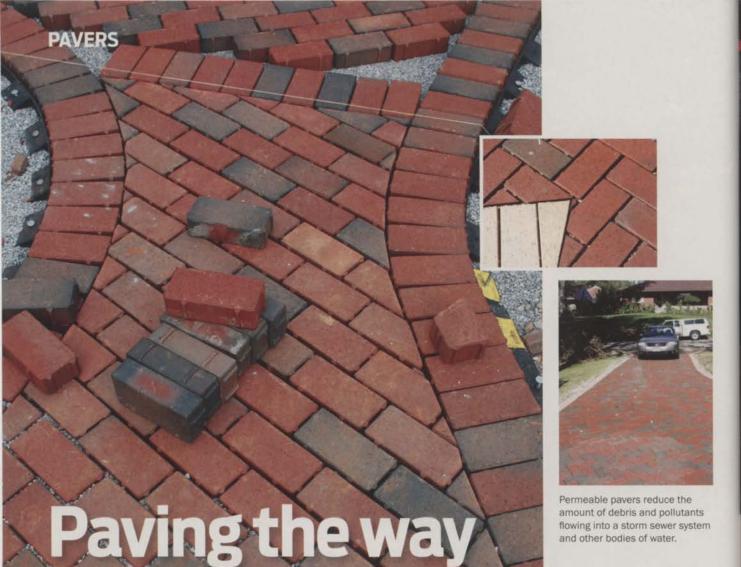
When I look at the image of the house with its large granite stone patio and the plants being allowed to grow naturally around the perimeter, it evokes a gentle feeling that this house is asking for permission to stay, while nature grows all around it. – Amelia B. Lima, APLD





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These permeable systems are proving environmentally and business friendly as concerns grow about stormwater runoff. By Tom Crain

ost environmental officials report that stormwater runoff is one of the more significant factors responsible for polluting U.S. waters today.

"The number one reason for the increasing number of beach closures due to contamination is stormwater runoff," says Kevin Earley, director of commercial sales for Nicolock Paving Stones in Long Island, N.Y. Stormwater picks up oils, chemicals, fertilizers, sedi-

ments, dirt and debris and many other pollutants flowing into a storm sewer system or directly to a lake, stream, river, wetland or coastal water. Anything that enters a storm sewer system can be discharged untreated into the water bodies used for swimming, fishing and providing drinking water.

But there is an effective solution to deter pollution from hitting waterways: installing permeable pavers.

Take the case of Lindenhurst Memorial Library's

new parking lot: "If it wasn't for the permeable pavers system we installed in 2009, most of the stormwater hitting the parking lot for the past couple years would have wound up in the Great South Bay through the sewer system," says Earley.

Another case study Earley is particularly proud of is the Bel Air, Md., historic town park project where his company installed another permeable interlocking concrete pavement (PICP) system that same year. All stormwater

runoff was eliminated with the system while the pavers themselves retained the park's historic integrity.

and other bodies of water.

Just like conventional paving systems, PICP systems create a strong, durable surface capable of carrying heavy loads. What makes them pervious is not the concrete itself, but the system of wide joints between the pavers set on a deep base of aggregate that allows the water to filter through. Contaminants are contained and excess water is absorbed



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PAVERS

into the subgrade below the surface.

Earley is a member of the American Society of Civil Engineers Standards Committee on Interlocking Concrete Pavements and the LID Task Committee on Permeable Pavements. He touts the numerous benefits of installing PICP systems. "There will continue to be increasing restrictions on stormwater runoff for both residential and commercial properties in most major cities," he says. "Increasingly, property owners are paying for water leaving their premises."

Cost savings is now also an incentive for customers. For less than the additional cost of a flexible pervious paved parking lot, developers quite often discover they can reduce construction costs by eliminating Environmental Protection Agency's Phase II

SAVING WITH PAVING

Whether a large residential patio or long strip mall walkway, hardscape projects can be tedious and time consuming to install. But they don't always have to be.

At the 2011 Hardscape North America's Outdoor Arena, Chuck Taylor, a national hardscape adviser, showed attendees how to use mechanical paver installation machines, placing nearly 2,600 square feet of concrete pavers.

"The demonstration is designed to show labor savings upwards of 60 percent over manually installed pavers," Taylor says.

Mechanical installations increases the capacity of a contractor using manually-installed labor to increase paver installations per day to quantities that range from 3,000-10,000 square feet depending upon such factors as accessibility, flow of materials, laying face width and the size of the paver layer.

"With these machines, a crew of three can set 100 pallets a day, or approximately 7,800 square feet of paving stone," Taylor says. "Without the machine, the same crew could only set approximately 1,000 square feet."

Based in Atlanta, Taylor has 35 years of experience as a designer/ builder for segmental paver systems. For the past 15 years, he served as a consultant to engineers, municipalities and stormwater designers for segmental construction of permeable pavement systems.

"For the past 30 years, there has been an increased market demand for paver-style installation," Taylor says. "And now that many municipalities are restricting water runoff on both commercial and residential properties, permeable interlocking pavers are increasing the demand even more."

The machines are capable of picking up an entire layer of pavers (9-

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Rule, which requires drainage and retention ponds that take up valuable land space and are costly to install.

Another incentive is the increasing focus on PICPs for inclusion in the LEED rating

system for new commercial construction. Stormwater containment is a high priority for LEED when assessing a site's environmental performance, responsible for scoring many valuable points. The advantages of PICP systems make it a solution not only for the environment, but for business growth as well. Lal.

The author is a freelance writer based in Akron, Ohio.

Did you miss the hardscape supplement in our February issue? Don't worry, you can find it on our website. Visit www.lawnandlandscape.com, click on current issue and February 2012.

14 square feet at a time) off a pallet, gripping them tightly and then placing the entire group into position atop the setting bed.

Just how fast is this task performed? With a good operator, the machines can put down an entire pallet of pavers within a few minutes. About every 12 seconds, the machine places another course of pavers.

To use the machines, block manufacturers must produce the blocks with molds and stack them in a pre-set pattern. The machines then clamp down, lift and place the blocks one at a time.

The machines articulate at two different points with one wheel following the other, allowing it to turn in a perfect circle with no side scuff while keeping the blocks extremely stable.

"Using a machine to lay pavers doesn't automatically mean you are going to save money on a project," Taylor says.

He cites the many factors to take into account include, the size of the project, number in the crew, efficiency of the crew and amount of material you handle in a day. Paver machines can run as high as \$60,000 to purchase, so most are contracted for individual jobs. For those willing to make the investment, there are opportunities.

Although you can install either ICPs or PICPs with machines, the demonstration featured PICP green pavers that were part of a sustainable pavement system designed to improve the ecological impact of a site. These types of pavement systems provide a green solution and contribute to the LEED process for sustainable site credits. – *Tom Crain*

Hardscape North America again will coincide with GIE+EXPO in 2012 in Louisville, Ky. The show will take place Oct. 24-26.



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Vegging C

If you're tired of installing the same old retaining walls, then vegetative walls is something to investigate. By Brian Horn-

hen Matt Ciminelli is working with a client and a retaining wall is needed on a project, he doesn't immediately suggest a vegetative retaining wall. Instead, he gives them the common options like a stone wall, and then brings up the alternative option.

"You don't come in and say, 'Well, I'd plant a vegetative wall.' You wait for your opportunity and you spring it on them ... unless they are asking for it," says Ciminelli, owner of Ciminelli's Landscape Services in Annapolis, Md.



Green walls are still new to a lot of customers, Ciminelli says, so when he suggests it, he gets a lot of blank stares. "Even architects and engineers - they're looking at me and I'll have to explain it to them. So that does happen quite frequently," he says.

One aspect that is easier about installing a green wall compared to a more common wall is you don't have to work around the elements as much.

"You don't have to cut every tree root you hit," he says.

In addition, imperfections won't be as obvious after installation.

"In the years to come, if there is disruption in the footing, people don't notice it in vegetative wall because it's all covered vegetation," he says. "On an anchor wall, it's noticeable."

Vegetative walls are an alternative option to present to a customer.



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RETAINING WALLS



If your new to vegetative retaining walls, try your first few projects on friends or good customers, and do it for free to get your feet wet.

But vegetative retaining walls do have some drawbacks - namely the care you have to provide for the plants.

"The staging is a little more difficult because you are dealing with live plant material," he says. "You have to have your plants lined up and you have to care for them."

This can especially be a problem if you are on a construction site with other contractors and you have to wait your turn. With a non-vegetative wall, you could just throw a tarp over the materials and wait your turn, but you have to give constant attention to your plant materials for a vegetative wall, Ciminelli says.

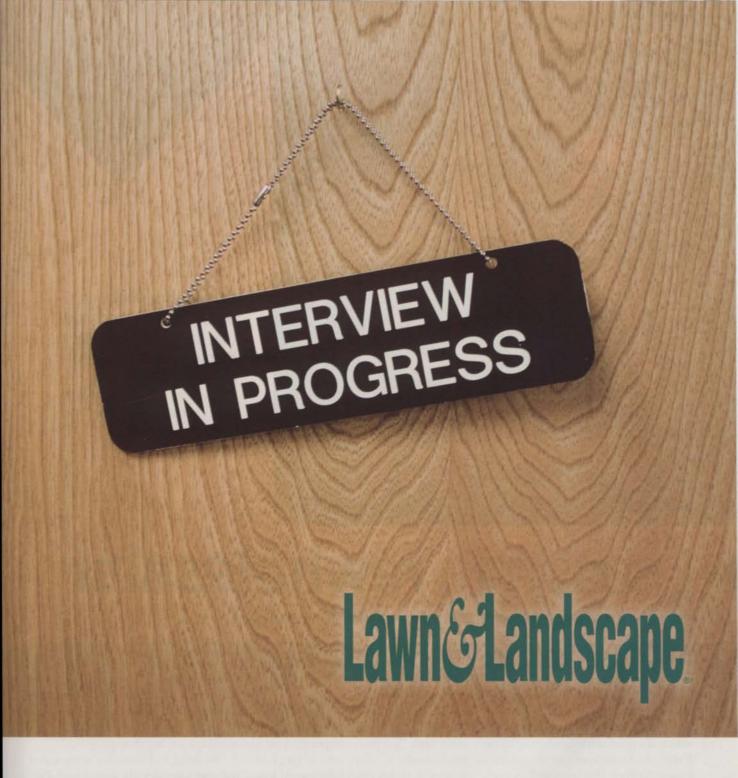
You also have to know your plant material. Ciminelli will make initial suggestions to a customer about what plants would work, but he also consults with a landscape architect to tweak what he already knows.

"For instance if it is already covered with an invasive plant, it's going to be hard to beat that plant out,"he says. "So you might make the call that we might just plant more of it, or we might plant something that can defend itself against that plant."

If you decide you want to add vegetative wall installation to your service, do some for free for family members, or a business you know well.

"Give it away to a restaurant, some high profile school, do a volunteer day or something and try some different things because if it fails, it's not going to kill you," he says. "Just see what works and get your feet wet." L&L

The author is an associate editor at Lawn & Landscape. He can be reached at bhorn@gie.net.



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A great rewholesale nursery is a one-stop shop that has quality material that you can trust when it hits the ground."

David Whittaker, Chatham Landscape Services

Choosing a rewholesaler

Consider these five questions before signing with a company. By Kelly Pickerel

ewholesale doesn't have to be a scary word. Many landscaping companies buy a large majority – if not all – of their plant materials from rewholesalers. If a good rewholesale business is found, the landscaper can save money, time and effort. This issue isn't so much finding a good rewholesaler but finding the right one that caters to a landscaper's specific needs. The following are some important questions to ask before choosing which rewholesaler to sign with.

WHAT CAN I BUY HERE? A better question might be what can't you buy? Buying from one place instead of using multiple sources is easier on

the landscaper, says David Whittaker, vice president of Chatham Landscape Services in Marietta, Ga.

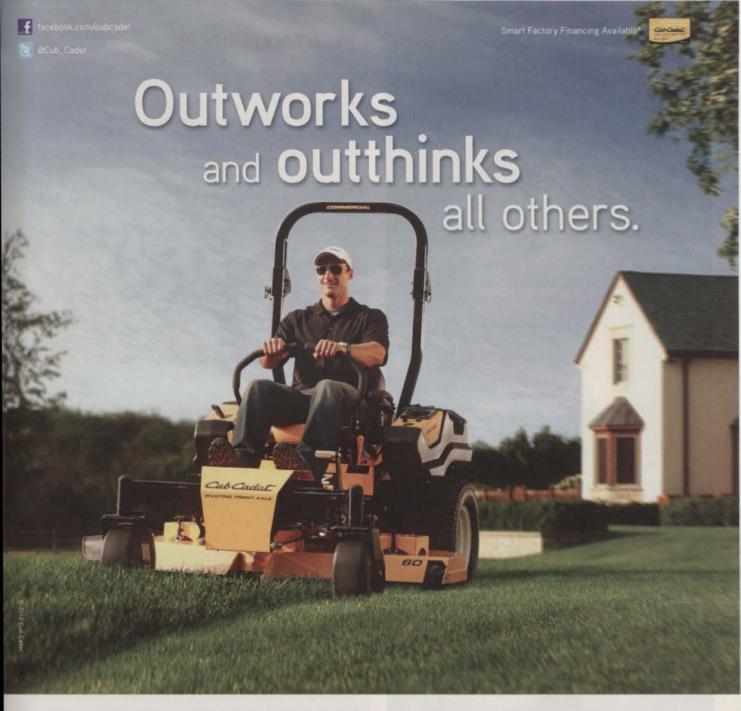
"When you're using a rewholesaler, you're already paying a markup," Whittaker says. "So you're depending on a rewholesaler to carry a wide range of materials. If they don't have something, I'll keep calling down the line till I find a source that has everything I need. I don't want to have to get one thing from here and another from there and pay for partial loads and delivery fees."

Pastorek Landscaping & Grounds Management in Pennsylvania gets 95 percent of its purchases from a rewholesaler. President Dave Pastorek says it's important to find someone who is knowledgeable about materials, because you might not realize a small mistake until a few months down the road. He says if a rewholesaler chooses a cheaper option rather than the one asked for, the result can be devastating.

"We do a lot of commercial work and the specs are already drawn up," Pastorek says. "The difference between two pieces can be big. If you have somebody that doesn't know what they're buying, trying to save money, it can change the whole project."

Whittaker adds that the best rewholesalers have everything you're looking for.

"A great rewholesale nursery is a onestop shop that has quality material that you can trust when it hits the ground,"



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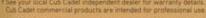
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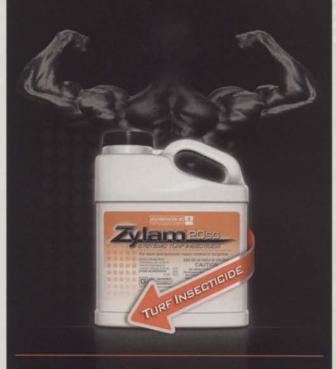


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PLANT MATERIAL

Whittaker says. "It has quality material all of the time, not some of the time." He says a few bad trees out of 100 can ruin an entire project. "Nothing makes me abandon a rewholesaler more than when I'm on a tight deadline and a few pieces need to be exchanged."

Rewholesalers aren't just for basic trees and bushes. Whittaker says he uses rewholesale material for all of Chatham's larger, commercial projects.

"We are able to use a rewholesaler," Whittaker says of highend projects. "But we can only use the (rewholesalers) that understand our business and the quality factor."

WHAT ARE THE COSTS? Don't be afraid to negotiate with the rewholesaler. They have the ability to play around with prices because they buy so much material in bulk. Eric Taylor, operations manager of Roundtree Landscaping in Dallas, says negotiating can only benefit you.

"With the way that the economy is, even though it's wholesale, we're still trying to get the best deal for the best quality materials. We work with renegotiation," Taylor says, adding that most rewholesalers give discounts if you buy larger amounts.

"If we buy exclusively from them, what kind of discount price can we get without sacrificing the quality?" Taylor says, noting that to Roundtree price does not trump quality.

Whittaker says it's important to make sure there is a set pricing structure in place. Inconsistent pricing strategies can ruin a business, he says. For example, if a landscaper buys flowers for \$10, and then the next week the rewholesaler increases the price to \$12, a \$2 variable can be crippling if buying large quantities.

"In a low margin business like landscape, that can be huge," Whittaker says of the \$2 difference. "Set pricing strategies specified for your needs."

Plant prices aren't the only thing worth looking in to. The current economic forecast can change the cost of delivery and labor very quickly.

"When gas prices start to shoot up, fees start to go up as well," Taylor says. "Different wholesalers charge (differently) for deliveries. Some vendors don't charge too much for delivery. I put all that into consideration when going with someone."

HOW QUICKLY CAN I GET MATERIALS? With projects being signed off on every day, the quicker plans get under way, the better.

Even if a rewholesaler doesn't have the materials in stock, Taylor says its better to at least have a workable time frame to plan around.

"A bad rewholesaler will just say, 'Oh, no, I don't have it.' They'll just leave it like that," he says. "The good ones will say, 'I don't have this right now, but I know I have some trucks coming in next week from these nurseries, and I'll see if I can get it for you.' They always give me a call back or shoot me an email to keep me updated. 'Hey I can get this in, but it might be a few weeks,' or 'I can get this in tomorrow. Will you be ready?' They go that extra mile."

Taylor adds that a good relationship with your rewholesaler can help you find specific items elsewhere.

"I just give them a call and they help me out a lot," he says. "If they don't have something, they help me by getting them shipped in for me from someone else. Then I don't have to get one plant shipped in from Louisiana and deal with the shipping costs."

what if Plans Change? Sometimes, project start dates can get moved around because of the threat of weather. Taylor says a good rewholesaler will try to work with your flexible schedule.

"If you don't schedule a delivery ahead of time, their delivery boards fill up," he says. "The good ones do what they've got to do to get that out to you. They take that extra step. It makes my life a whole lot easier. Otherwise, I'm having to drive out there myself and make arrangements."

Whittaker also says communication is key.

"If they don't deliver 100 percent of the order, they have to communicate," he says. "It's OK, especially if it's a lengthy job. Mistakes happen, but they have to contact the company as soon as there is an issue. They need to call the buyer and say, 'We're not going to deliver on these items,' so (the buyer) can readjust."

Suggests searching your local area first because rewholesale companies are everywhere. "I would first try out the larger, more established ones that have been in the area for awhile," he says. "The bigger ones are really good about working with you, and all you've got to do is contact them and a salesperson will come out."

Pastorek says it's a matter of finding who matches you. "Find a good relationship, a trusting relationship," he says. "If you don't feel comfortable, don't be there."

Great rewholesalers are "few and far between," says Whittaker, but they're an asset to the landscaping industry.

"(Rewholesalers) are a necessary ser-

vice," Whittaker says. "When business is slow, and you write a contract today that starts tomorrow, there's no time to set up deliveries. It's not practical to go straight to the source." LAL.

The author is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.



MARCH 2012

Compiled by Sarah Martinez

A place for everything

single new and noteworthy plant can jazz up Heven the most run-of-the-mill projects. Before you submit your next bid and spec list, cruise through this list of introductions and consider substituting an old standby with a new offering.

Give your installations a new look with these project-specific introductions.

Perennial borders



Echinacea

Darwin Perennials Double Scoop series includes varieties with large, double flowers sporting eve-catching colors. With clean foliage and brilliant blossoms, they make a great addition to perennial borders. The series include Bubble Gum (pink), Raspberry (dark pink) and Orangeberry.



'Sweet 16' from Walters Gardens produces large stems of vibrant rosepurple buds, which open to larger, brighter lavender-pink flowers with a purple lip. It reaches 18-24 inches tall, and 24-28 inches wide.



Scabiosa

Skagit Gardens' new Scabiosa Mariposa Violet has large, deep-violet, pincushion flowers that are fully double on sturdy stems. This compact perennial produces loads of blossoms above bushy foliage from June to October.

Foundation plantings

Boxwood

Conard-Pyle Co.'s Buxus 'Highlander' is easily one of the fastest-growing boxwoods on the market, putting on as much as 24-30



inches of new growth per year. It has a distinct, upright, pyramidal habit.

Nandina

Southern Living Plant Collection's Nandina domestica Obsession ('Seika') is an upright,



compact, dense grower with brilliantred new foliage - much richer than ordinary nandinas. Foliage matures to a deep green.

Rhododendron

The Southern Living Plant Collection now includes a series of rhododendrons bred



to perform well in the Deep South. The Southgate series from Plant Development Services also performs equally well in traditional rhododendrongrowing areas. Plants grow roughly 3-4 feet high and wide.

McCorkle Nurseries'



Stand-out specimens

Gardenia

Pinwheel gardenia is 4 by 4 feet in size and is ideal as a specimen or patio container plant.



Annual beds



Calibrachoa

Proven Winners has added several new varieties to its Superbells calibrachoa series, including Cherry Star. Cherry Star has petals that are a rich cherry color with minimal fading. A breeding breakthrough is the new star pattern that stays consistent, even in the heat.



Euphorbia

Euphoric White from Syngenta Flowers/Gold-Fisch is a vigorous, wellbranched plant that fills pots and baskets quickly. Plants are early to bloom, with an abundance of large, white bracts even under stressful summer conditions.



Petunia

The newest addition to the Fortunia series from Fides North America is Silver Vein. This variety has large flowers with a beautiful dark-purple heart and clear veins. It is very vigorous, with great garden performance.

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PLANT INTRODUCTIONS

Hydrangea

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Virginia sweetspire

Itea virginica Scarlet Beauty is a new introduction from Chicagoland Grows. It's a



summer flowering shrub with excellent fall color. Grow as a specimen plant or mass on moist banks for soil stabilization. Mature plants are broad-rounded and measure about 3-4 feet tall and 4 feet wide in five years.

Tropicals for containers

Canna

Chocolate Sunrise from PlantHaven produces warm, sunshinevellow flowers. Plants



exhibit a tight clumping habit, measuring 48 inches tall by 36 inches wide. It's hardy to USDA Zone 7b.

Colocasia

'Black Coral' is part of the Royal Hawaiian series from PlantHaven. It features deep-black



glossy foliage with electric-blue veins. The Royal Hawaiian colocasias have been bred to be sturdy garden performers and container specimens.

Hibiscus

Cranberry Crush from Walters Gardens features near-black buds that open to glossy,



deep scarlet-red 7-8 inch wide flowers with heavily overlapping petals. It's an ideal border or container plant, growing 3-4 feet tall and 4-5 feet wide.

Rose garden selections

Lady of Shallot

Lady of Shallot is one of the hardiest introductions from David Austin Roses. The



young buds are a rich orange-red and open to a salmon-pink upper side. It grows up to 4 feet tall and 3 1/2 feet wide.







Gold Medallion is the newest introduction in Greenheart Farms' Garden Treasures micro-miniature col-



lection. These disease-resistant roses are self cleaning and low maintenance. Garden Treasures can be used as annuals or perennials.

Cape Diamond

Cape Diamond from Weeks Roses is ideal for Northern climates; it's hardy to USDA Hardiness Zone 3.



Plants are vigorous and can be grown as a large, spreading shrub or trained as a climber. It features old-fashioned, pure-pink flowers.

Screens and hedges

Camellia

Monrovia's Camellia sasanqua Pink Yuletide ('MonDel') features pink flowers, centered



with bright-yellow stamens. It's fragrant and a beautiful addition to a winter garden. It's ideal as a hedge, screen or border shrub.

Bayberry

LCN Selections' Myrica pensylvanica Bobbee ('Bobzam') is a compact variety selected



for its habit and dense, rounded form. It grows 6 feet tall and 6-8 feet wide. Foliage is darker, wavier glossier and larger than the species.

Trees for structure

Maple

J. Frank Schmidt & Son Co.'s Northern Glow maple (A. pseudosieboldianum x pal-



matum 'Hasselkus') has deeply-cut leaves that emerge bronze-green and mature to medium green. The autumn foliage glows bright orange-red to deep red.

Redbud

Greenleaf Nurseries introduced Cercis canadensis 'Ruby Falls' from PlantHaven. It's



the first weeping redbud variety on the market with purple leaves. It will eventually reach 6 feet tall and 4 feet wide. To read about vines, including Clematis and Honeysuckle, for arbors and pergolas, visit www. lawnandlandscape.com and search for "plant introductions," to find the rest of this story.





The liquid vs. dry debate

Striking a balance between consistency and cost can be difficult when choosing and applying fertilizers. By Matthew Noon

fter sitting down with our company agronomist to review our product usage from the past year, I realized that we needed a new product strategy. During the past several years, we have experienced rapid growth, which has put a tremendous amount of pressure on top managers to control costs. Product cost for a lawn care company is a major expense that is a large factor that controls profit margins.

Negotiating product pricing with our vendors is one of the more important decisions we make all year. It has been my experience to see lawn care companies' product expense vary from 10-20 percent per year.

While many companies say that they make their product decisions based only for financial reasons, others base it on quality and results. For the past 12 years, we have wrestled with using liquid or granular. Some years we have used liquid and others we have used granular products – both having their advantages and disadvantages.

Through trials and tribulations, we have come to the conclusion that there really isn't a right or wrong answer. Decisions need to be made based on each individual company's specific circumstances. These decisions should be based on cost, storage, equipment and, most importantly, results. At the end of the day, results are the most important because without that you don't have a loyal customer.

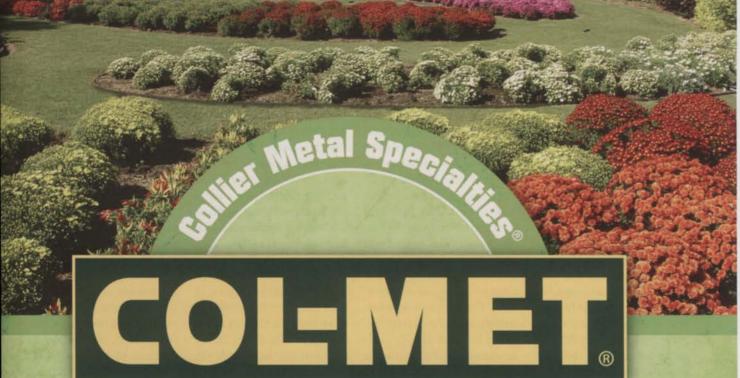
I have realized that combining liquid and granular fertilizers into our program was the perfect blend depending on the round.

THE CASE FOR LIQUID. Using liquid fertilizers has helped with client perception. When selling a service, you never want to make a client feel that they can do the same job them-selves. When one

of our 500 gallon spray trucks arrives at a client's home and the technician begins spraying, value is truly added.

The client just feels that they can't do it themselves. I liken it to when you dine out for brick oven pizza. I don't care how good I can make pizza at home, it does not compare to eating pizza just cooked in a 600-degree brick oven. The service experience is there in spraying rather that applying granular. You wow the client and make them feel that they are receiving value that they could never attain.

Liquid fertilizers have their benefits, as many of you



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already realize. As we slowly moved over to using it, as well as granular, it was a perfect mix, but it took some time to train our staff and adjust to this new method.

I also thought it was in our company's best interest to assert more control over our own mixing. This created consistency in our products and deterred theft and carelessness in product usage. For example, a lawn technician may not pay attention to the setting of her spreader and apply too much or too little granular to the application.

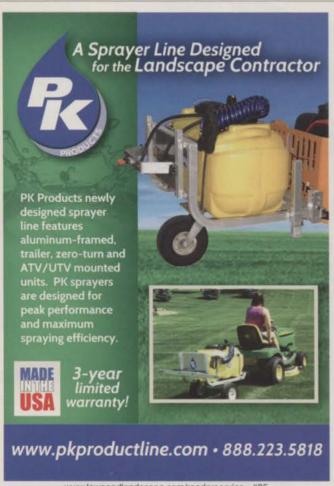
When we mix our own products, we can analyze our program during the year in such features as nitrogen output or usage of weed control, as well as eliminating the waste of opened bags not fully used. It also increased our quality control in treating weeds. No matter how well one manages a lawn technician, if he has to pass over the lawn twice to do the job. the second time around will never be as consistent as the first time. When our technicians are using granular fertilizers, they miss areas when treating weeds and crabgrass.

Loading our trucks each morning was beginning to look like one of those crazy restaurant kitchens with chefs bumping into each other. It was a madhouse when all we used was granular. Loading a half a dozen pallets of fertilizer into trucks was exhausting and labor intensive. It is also a lot cleaner to treat with liquids rather than granular. When using granular, technicians lose a lot of product when unopened bags are subject to the elements and products can spill onto driveways and walkways.

There are many advantages to having liquid in your program; however, one drawback is the up-front cost. To administer liquid applications, one needs the investment of equipment. That is the need for agitating enhanced spray tanks to apply liquid fertilizer on lawns. This equipment can range in cost from \$4,000-\$18,000. Additionally, if it is the desire to mix the liquid products prior to distributing to each individual truck, there is the need to invest in a bulk mixing tank system.

We invested in this when we reached 30 trucks in our service location. This cost us approximately \$40,000. So, although it is a very good investment, it will take three vears to see a return on investment. However, once accomplished, we have a clean method of loading trucks quickly and efficiently, making it more cost-effective.

THE CASE FOR GRANULAR. Granular is much more cost









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effective to apply. Typically all one needs is a \$400 dollar spreader, a \$14 bag of fertilizer and a certified applicator for application. It's also a phenomenal fertilizer to apply during dry and hot period times of the year.

Slow release granular fertilizers are much better for feeding lawns that are suffering from heat stress and dry weather. Typically, our company applies slow release

There are five best practices LCOs should know when it comes to applying herbicides. You can find them at www. lawnandlandscape.com, search "herbicide."

granular fertilizers during the summer and fall seasons. When applied, our 30 percent slow-release fertilizers allow lawns to be fed slowly to avoid burning. Additionally, lawns can then be fed with less frequency.

They also make for a fantastic management tool. We have all received that call from a customer that the lawn technician did not treat the entire lawn or even treat it at all.

It is very easy for one of our service managers to immediately visit and address the situation by physically going to the lawn and seeing for themselves. A better solution is to educate the customer on the phone to go to the lawn and look closely to actually detect the granular fertilizer.

When we began our business, we were servicing less than 1,000 customers with granular fertilizers. It was easy to scale our service initially with granular fertilizer, although we always used liquid herbicides and insecticides. As our company grew and we needed to control costs and consistency in product, we slowly transitioned into both liquid and granular fertilizers and we have finally struck a perfect balance.

We start the first several rounds using liquid fertilizer to feed the lawn quickly without a slow release, because we know we will be back again in five weeks. We also have the ability of mixing the preemergent and broadleaf control so that we can hit control for every problem weed and grass on the lawn with one pass by technician. We then transition into a granular slow-release fertilizer for the warm and dry season and the fall as it is better for the lawn.

Having this balance has saved our company time, wages and product cost. Most importantly, we keep our customers best interests in mind by developing a superior lawn care program throughout the year. L&L

The author is president of Noon Turf Care based in Hudson, Mass.



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Steady FLOW

Contractors are forecasting a stronger year for water features and marketing their services to capitalize on this segment. By Lyndsey Frey

Water features provide customers interaction and tranquility from their landscapes.

ark Russo admits he's addicted to water. The obsession began about 11 years ago after installing a pond in his backyard, which eventually led to three and the launch of his full-service water feature business, Rocky Mountain Waterscape in Erie, Colo.

"(Water features) provide openly more interaction with the landscape than any other single item," says Russo, the president and owner. "They can provide an element of tranquility to any landscape ... and that background sound is really music in the garden 24 hours a day."

Waterfalls, ponds or even fountains can transform any outdoor setting into an alluring paradise because they add life – literally, in many cases – movement and sound to an otherwise stagnant landscape design.

But as consumers look to trim spending, water features for commercial or residential jobs have been drying (Continued on pg. 122)



High MAINTENANCE

Don't be fooled by the pure beauty and soothing vibrations of water features. They require consistent maintenance – much more than, say, shrubbery.

Mark Russo of Rocky Mountain Waterscape says contractors should be honest when selling water features and be careful not to oversell their simplicity. He's heard too many horror stories of potential customers coming to him with green ponds or dead fish.

"Much like your lawn needs to be mowed every week, your water feature requires a few minutes of attention, as well," says Russo, who recommends maintenance on an average water feature at least every couple of weeks. "On the plus side, you can turn that into an additional revenue stream, It's enough to be a profitable part of our business."

Russo names the top three maintenance issues contractors should keep in mind:

Keep out organic debris. Anything organic that blows into a water feature, such as leaves, grass clippings, branches, etc., has the potential to break down and become algae food.

Keep water healthy. Make sure your water feature has excellent filtration, especially if you're going to introduce fish. It's better to over filter than under filter, Russo says.

3 Add water treatments on a regular basis. To avoid green ponds, make sure you add water treatments at least every couple of weeks.





Companies that install water features can add maintenance to their service list for extra revenue and higher profit.

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Division of Worldlawn Power Equipment Beatrice, Nebraska (Continued from pg. 120) up. So landscapers in the arid West are trying new tactics – along with some tried and true methods – to market their services and capitalize on this segment in 2012.

"One of the things we're doing differently is we've joined almost a networking partnership with a local housekeeper," says Ralph Biezad, owner of Phoenix-based Pondscapes and who also sets up displays at local nurseries to build business. "We're referring each other out, so we're getting the word out to even more potential customers that we wouldn't have had in the past."

It's an exclusive referral system. Biezad refers the housekeeper's services to his customers and vice versa. Because the majority of Biezad's customers are snowbirds, there is strong demand for the maintenance of his customers' homes and land-scapes, while they are away during the summer months.

And it's really paying dividends. Since the partnership began at the beginning of this year, Biezad has already gained 17 – and counting – additional accounts, five of which are for water feature maintenance and two are for the installation. In fact, he's experienced a 100 percent



Landscape contractors say the water feature market is coming back.

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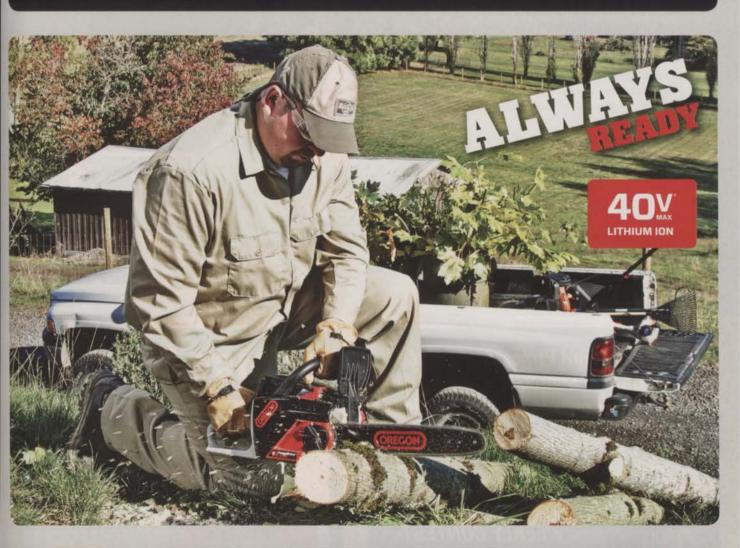
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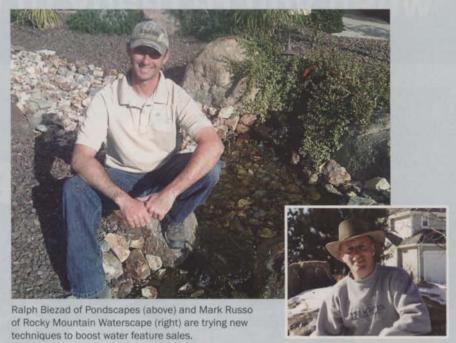


PowerNow[™] Cordless Tool System success rate through this partnership, thus far.

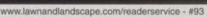
"This year, we're forecasting to be close to \$400,000 (in revenue)," says Biezad, who nearly doubled his revenue in 2011. Currently, installation and maintenance of water features only comprise about a third of his business, but he hopes to increase that to about 50 percent by the end of this year due to this partnership.

Russo is making a big push with garden home shows this year to not only gain new customers, but also strengthen his relationships with landscape contractors to complement his water feature services. To date, he has three shows booked, including the Denver Home Show in March, and plans to add additional garden shows in outlying areas.

"In general, home shows give you









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WATER FEATURES

an air of credibility," he says. "People see you year after year; you get that brand awareness out there. For me, it's a way to kick-start my season, as well."

Russo typically receives \$200,000-\$300,000 worth of sales from a garden show. Throughout the show, he's booking consultations and out in the field giving estimates to potential customers so by the end of it, he has worked lined up for months.

Russo says 2012 should be a strong year, judging by the size of water features he's building. In 2007 and earlier, typically the water features he built were in the \$10,000-\$50,000 range. In 2008 and 2009, although they built almost as many, they were much smaller, in the \$6,000-\$15,000 range. But in 2010 and 2011, he saw that average size start to climb back up the scale.

"I interpret that as people willing to let go of a little more money," says Russo, who projects revenues between \$800,000 and \$900,000 this year, just barely under his all-time high of just more than \$1 million in 2007. "I think there's pent-up demand. We're Americans, and we like to spend money." LALL

The author is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.

Rules of **PROPER PLUMBING**

Apart from the aesthetic features of waterfalls, ponds and fountains, such as the pavers, plants and wildlife, the thing has to work. Pumps come in a confusing array of models and sizes, and choosing the correct pump is paramount to keeping the life of a water feature strong for years to come.

"If you have too much water flow, you're not filtering the water properly," says Ralph Biezad of Pondscapes in Phoenix. "If you have too little water flow, you're running the risk of not oxygenating the water efficiently."

Biezad shares the top three questions he asks himself when choosing the correct size and model pump for each job:

2 How high will the pump have to lift the water? Pumps are rated in gallons per hour based on a certain threshold of elevation. To determine the rise, factor in the distance from the pump to the waterfall, the vertical elevation from the water level to the waterfall, and lastly, the width and length of the pond.

3 How wide is my waterfall? As a general rule, most ponds use a minimum of 100 gph for every inch of the waterfall's width.

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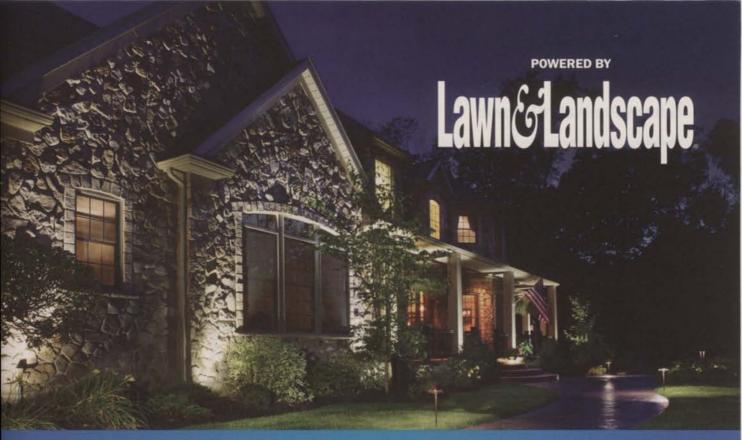
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Gravely Pro-Walk 61 mower

The pitch: Gravely introduces the new commercial Pro-Walk 61 mower with a 23-hp Kawasaki FS 691v engine and a 61-in. cutting width.

- · Features a fixed and floating deck.
- . The floating deck cuts to the contours of the landscape and is lockable, giving operators the adaptability for changing terrain and improving the finished appearance.
- · Built with a durable, fabricated seven-gauge steel deck, the newly designed Pro-Walk has a heavy-duty rubber sidedischarge chute to expel clippings faster and farther without clogging.

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BigDog Mowers T-series walk-behind

The pitch: The BigDog T-series walk-behind mower features the PowerBar Steering System and easy hand operated deck lift.

- · All T-Series mowers come equipped with Kawasaki FS engines, available in 16-24 hp.
- . Comes with a 36-, 48- or 54-in, deck and an optional electric start on the 54-in., 24-hp model.
- · No daily lube points, and integrated serviceable ZT2800 transmissions.
- . 18- or 20-in, drive tires and a 3.6-gallon fuel capacity.

For more information: www. bigdogmowers.com



Wright Velke Pistol Grip Hydro Mowers

The pitch: Wright Manufacturing's Velke pistol grip hydro mowers can be operated as a walk-behind or it can be paired with Wright's Velke foldaway sulky as a ride behind.

- Deck widths of 32-, 36-, 48- and 52-in.
- · The mower has an integrated latch system for easy deployment and stowage of Wright's Velke sulky.
- · Simpler hydraulic control system with fewer components.

For more information: www.wrightmfg.com



Mean Green Electric Mower

The pitch: The Mean Green WBX-33 electric mower is capable of mowing more than 1 acre on a single charge.

- · Features a one-click key start, and no choking, cranking or warming up is needed.
- . No gear shifting, easy fingertip variable speed control up to 5 mph forward and 2.5 mph in reverse.
- · Auto-shutdown of mowing blades before batteries are depleted allows plenty of power to get back to charging area.
- · Fits through 36-in. gates and basement doors for storage.

For more information: www.meangreenproducts.com

For companies that produce propane walk-behinds, search "walk-behind mowers" on www.lawnandlandscape.com.





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Boyd Loveless

Nutri-Lawn

Interviewed By Lee Chilcote

Why did you get involved in franchising and when did you start?

I had been managing a Nutri-Lawn operation in Jamestown, Newfoundland for four to five years when I approached the owner about buying him out.

I saw that Nutri-Lawn had a good name and was well-established in the local community and across Canada, and I saw an opportunity to chart a path for myself and my family by owning my own business.

I have been with Nutri-Lawn going on six years. Growth has been very steady; we've probably grown about 15-20 percent per year on average over that six year period.

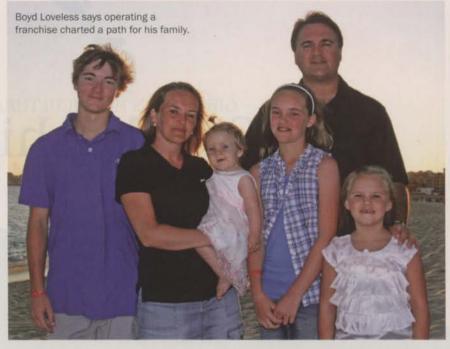
What are the advantages and disadvantages of franchising?

The biggest advantage with Nutri-Lawn is the family atmosphere.

You can always go to the corporate office if you have questions or need advice.

I don't see any disadvantages. A lot of people ask about the franchise fee, and when I first got involved, I thought of it as a hefty franchise fee that I had to pay every year.

Yet I don't think of it as an expense anymore, but as an investment.



What advice would you have for someone who is thinking about buying a franchise? My advice would be, don't hesitate to ask questions. Talk to the corporate people

and the franchisees.

Do a bit of mystery shopping as a customer, too, and see what they're all about. Sit down with them face to face and get a feel for what they're going through.

I would also suggest looking at the company's efforts in the community.

I think that it says a lot about the values of the franchisers if they're heavily involved in the community through sponsorships, donations or other forms of giving back.

What do you know now that you wish you knew when you started franchising?

Be less hesitant at the beginning. Corporate franchisers are there to help you. Don't put up a wall between yourself and them or hesitate to receive what they have to give you.

5 What type of personality is best-suited for being a franchisee?

Anybody can be a franchisee if you have the financial backing. You've got to be a go-getter, energetic and self-motivated. You have to believe in what the franchiser is preaching and marketing, and you have to be open-minded and willing to learn. Lea

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How to: Relocate a tree

Relocating trees can be tricky because of the sheer amount of factors involved. The tree has to be healthy, the weather conditions need to be right and the actual removal process can cause stress and even death to a tree if not done correctly.

When taking into account weather conditions, its best not to move a tree when the temperature is extremely hot or cold, or the area is facing heavy moisture situations or drought, says AJ Fox, division vice president of tree transplant company Environmental Design, "The other main horticulture thing would be bud break," Fox says. "Once the tree is pushing out new growth, you want to steer clear of relocating it."

The biggest mistake Fox says landscapers tend to make is taking too small of a root ball when removing the tree from the ground.

"The rule of thumb is for every caliper inch of tree trunk at 1 foot off the ground, you want 10-12 inches of root ball," he says.

Here Fox offers five more important steps for relocating a tree. - Carolyn LaWell



Select the tree. The primary factors that go into selecting a tree are species, health, time of year and location. "Location and logistics play a large role in determining if it's a good candidate," Fox says.

Use your local nursery or state and national associations as a resource. "For smaller material what we call nursery stock - it's always best to go through the process with a local nursery, asking and making sure you understand local planting conditions, soil types, moisture requirements," Fox says.

If you chose to use the boxing method, first root prune with hand tools. such as a shovel, spade or water jet. "Refrain from using any type of machinery, be it a backhoe or trencher, because mechanical means tend to tear the roots instead of cutting them," Fox says. The roots should be cut to a depth of 24-36 inches, depending on the size of the tree.

Expose the sides around the tree to the depth of the box you're using. Larger boxes can be up to 60 inches in total depth. Fox says. Place the sides of the box around the tree, excavate underneath the tree and place the bottom on the box. Then reinforce with steel banding.

The method of removing the tree from the ground depends on its size. but it's always best to transport the tree vertically to relieve stress on the root ball. "Anytime you're laying a tree over on its side, extra care has to be given to it,' Fox says. "The success of relocating a tree is making sure that you keep the root ball intact."

CE Attachments EDGE Wood Chipper

The pitch: CEAttachments has added the EDGE wood chipper attachment for skidsteer loaders.

 The new standard-flow EDGE wood chipper attachment turns brush, branches and leaves into chips for use as groundcover for pathways, or in flowerbeds to control weeds and retain moisture.



- The EDGE wood chipper features a 20-x-20-in, self-feeding hopper opening to handle large and awkward size branches up to 4-inch in diameter, and angles brush against the blades as it pulls material into the chipper.
- Air intake vents maximize the blowing force to power the chips out of the chute up to 20 feet.

For more information: www.ceattachments.com

Paladin FFC V-Blade

The pitch: The FFC V-Blade manufactured by Paladin Construction Group attaches to skid-steers and compact wheel loaders up to operating weights of 13,200 lbs.



- The FFC V-Blade adjusts to achieve straight, left/right, scoop or V-position.
- . Comes in blade widths ranging from 60 in.-120 in.
- . The FFC V-Blade offers a reversible cutting edge.
- Fully adjustable skid shoes allow the user to match operations to varying job conditions, while top and side pinch guards increase safety and keep the pivot area free of debris.

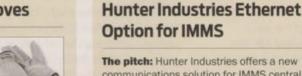
For more information: www.paladinconstructiongroup.com

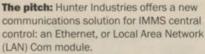
Galeton Thinsulate Panther Gloves

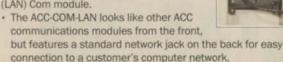
The pitch: Galeton has added Thinsulate lined gloves to its line of Panther Driver's Gloves.

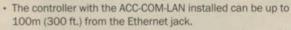
- · Constructed from leather.
- Feature 40 grams of 3M Thinsulate lining to keep workers' hands warm in cold weather.
- The new Thinsulate Lined Panther Driver's Gloves are available in sizes small through XX-large.

For more information: www.galeton.com









 The LAN or Ethernet module can still also be used to reach additional controllers via UHF radio or hardwired cable.

For more information: www.hunterindustries.com



Proven Winners Rockapulco Coral Reef

The pitch: Rockapulco Coral Reef brings a bright new color to the Rockapulco series of Double Impatiens from Proyen Winners.

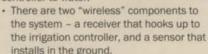
- Double Impatiens from Proven Winners.

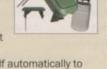
 Coral Reef flowers open with warm coral tones and slowly transform to pink shades as they mature.
- This variety is the most floriferous of all the Rockapulco colors, and carries with it the same shade performance as the existing seven colors of Rockapulcos.
- Coral Reef will also be added to the P. Allen Smith Platinum Collection of Proven Winners plants.

For more information: www.pwfourstar.com

Toro Precision Soil Sensor

The pitch: The Toro Precision Soil Sensor measures moisture levels in the soil and determines when to allow the irrigation controller to water.





- Once installed, the sensor calibrates itself automatically to determine the soil type. Any time the moisture level exceeds the user-defined optimum level for the plant material, the controller is prevented from running any irrigation programs.
- Communication between the sensor probe and the receiver is completely wireless, with an operating range of up to 500 ft., and installation doesn't require any digging.

For more information: www.toro.com



Water management

Cities are regulating how your customers can water their lawns, so it's up to you to keep their yards looking green.

By Brian Horn

ith local water restrictions becoming stricter, landscape contractors and lawn care operators are finding it increasingly difficult to keep lawns looking fresh and green. Soon, you're giving your customers excuses that they don't want to hear, even if they are valid. They just want you to make their lawn look nice. By adding a water management service to your company, you can keep your customer happy, while staying within the constraints of the law.

Mark Govan, president of ABC Pest Control in Tampa, Fla., has added a water



Providing water management services can be an easy way to make a profit.

management chemical to his company and offered a service to customers that would reduce their watering amount. The product is applied to the grass, and it pulls water vapor out of the air and directs it back to the plants root system.

Govan sells the water management service as part of the company's spraying program, and they provide the service every three months. For a 5,000-square-foot residential lawn, Govan says he charges \$85 for the treatment and makes about a 50 percent profit on it. Because of strict water restrictions, Govan says homeowners are looking

for ways to keep their lawn looking nice without hurting the environment.

"If we can only water twice a week, this takes that one day of watering a week away so people can not only save water by not having to apply it as often, but now your plants aren't wilting. And we all know when a plant dries out it dies out," Govan says. "So, we stop that process from ever starting."

Govan says it was hard originally to make homeowners aware of the product and the service. Through his radio show, he was able to talk about the service, but some still

> weren't sold. To convince them the service was worth it, he would offer to do half the lawn for free as a way of showing the skeptics the product's effectiveness.

"When one side of the lawn looks great and the other side of the lawn is dead, it didn't take them very long to have them call us," he says. "It's a freebie. We can sacrifice an ounce or two of the product to get a regular, long-term customer."

Technicians could use the same equipment they would

normally use, except for a different spray nozzle, to apply the product, says Mike Roberts, technical director. Govan says he would like to do a cost analysis comparison to show that purchasing the service would be cheaper than the money they would spend to water the lawn more frequently.

"If you are using city water, it's expensive," he says. "In order for homeowners to purchase that water to put down on their grass; they're spending a lot of money."

The author is associate editor at Lawn & Landscape. He can be reached at bhorn@gie.net.

PROFILE

Company name: ABC Pest Control

Founder and president: Mark Govan

Location: Tampa, Fla.

Founded: 1985

Revenue: \$3 million

Employees: 38 year round

Customer breakdown: 93% residential; 7% commercial

Services: pest control, lawn and ornamental, tree injections and irrigation

66 QUOTE

"If we can only water twice a week, this takes that one day of watering a week away so people can not only save water by not having to apply it as often, but now your plants aren't wilting."

> - MARK GOVAN, FOUNDER AND PRESIDENT, ABC PEST CONTROL

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Lighting

This firm tackles lighting from all angles. By Carolyn LaWell

Pete Bryant wanted to distinguish his services from all the other contractors who just stuck fixtures in the ground and called it landscape lighting.

So, about five years ago, he started Southern Lights, a sister company to his landscape management firm, Southern Exposure.

By creating a company that solely offered lighting, he figured he could get customers from two companies and heighten what landscape lighting really should look like.

"Every landscaper says that they do lighting, but really most of them don't know much more than putting in a couple of path lights," Bryant says.

Bryant says his companies have been successful with lighting for two reasons.

First, they have dedicated time to training, experimenting and understanding what good lighting looks like. He's active in Association of Outdoor Lighting Professionals and practices at home with different fixtures, wattages, angles and colored lenses.

Second, he goes after two different types of customers – ones just looking for landscape lighting and others looking





Contractors can expect a 40-60 percent profit from lighting services.

for landscapes and hardscapes that can include lighting in the package.

Besides a website, e-marketing and social media, Southern Lights hasn't done much marketing. A stronger marketing plan is scheduled for 2012, but because of its small exposure, Bryant still gets most of his lighting business through his landscape firm. And lighting makes up 15 percent of that business.

While Bryant wanted to separate himself from his competitors, lighting also made sense to spinoff because of the sheer cost associated with the service. "It takes very little overhead to run that portion," he says. "You don't have to have a \$100,000 truck and a (loader) and everything to run it. ... There's better margin on it."

The profit margin on a lighting job depends on how many fixtures are installed and whether or not their visible, Bryant says. What he typically takes away is a 40-60 percent profit on a lighting job.

The biggest selling point is his companies have an acre and a half design studio that allows prospective customers to see and touch materials. Bryant was able to work with vendors to install landscapes, outdoor kitchens, water features, lighting – real life examples of what projects can look like. "We've been able to create several different living spaces throughout our shop, so we do not have to send somebody to look at somebody's backyard that we landscaped and installed lighting on," he says.

While Bryant's firm offers design/build services, he also works with a deck builder who does renovations, remodels and room additions. By teaming up with a company that doesn't offer lighting, Bryant receives referrals without having to do much work.

Southern Exposure always includes lighting in landscape designs even if the client doesn't ask for it. "It's accounted for, people know that it's an option up front and not a last minute thought," he says. "Usually budgets dwindle down by the end of the project."

PROFILE

Company name: Southern Exposure

Founded: 1995

Employees: 14

Revenue: n/a

Customer breakdown: 85% residential; 15% commercial

Services: design/build, maintenance, lighting, irrigation, synthetic lawns

When presenting the design to clients, Bryant stresses his team knows how to incorporate lighting with plant materials and hardscapes because they are landscapers. "We can account for all of this stuff upfront," he says. "Where some of the lighting companies that only do lighting, they can't do that because they can't get in on a project or they weren't involved on the project in the beginning."

When trying to sell a lighting project, Bryant covers every aspect from wattages to amperages. "Sometimes you bore a customer with all the details. But at the end of the appointment, they'll know what you're talking about," he says. "I think that makes the difference in a customer's mind that you're worth the money you're asking for because you specialize in it."

Finally, he uses a return-on-investment spreadsheet to show customers what they're paying for and what they're getting, "If you can show a homeowner ways they're going to save money over time – using LED bulbs versus candescent or versus line voltage – that goes a long way," he says.

"Selling a maintenance plan, too, that gets us in the door if you're using a spread-sheet. If we install LEDs, it's going to cost you \$2,000 more now, but it's going to save you \$4,000 over the next eight years."

The author is an associate editor at Lawn & Landscape. She can be reached at clawell@gie.net.

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Edging

This service gives clients a cleaner looking landscape and companies less upkeep. By Carolyn LaWell

irk Vandenberg tries to design edging into every project. Here's why – he says edging products are a resource that's readily available, it makes the landscape's lines clean and it means less maintenance in the long run.

"Edging is what I would consider something that is incredibly helpful but every budget doesn't allow for it," says Vandenberg, a landscape designer and salesman for Katerberg VerHage. "In most instances I will design landscape edging in, and I primarily use aluminum edging."

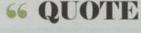
Why aluminum edging? In recent years, aluminum edging technology has improved, Vandenberg says. The shape holds better, it blends in with the landscape better and the material stays in the ground better. Previous technology would push up out of the ground when it would frost, a problem for Katerberg VerHage, which is based in Grand Rapids, Mich.

Vandenberg says he designs edging into both residential and commercial projects because, in the end, it saves time and headaches. "It helps to minimize maintenance when you do have your aluminum edging in a project," he says. "Otherwise, every year you have to trim out your beds to make sure they're the right size. Where with the aluminum edging, typically you can just refresh the backside and do some more minor maintenance to your bed lines."

However, it's not a service every client can afford. The actual cost of edging varies based on soil type, construction or retrofit, color, shape and thickness, Vandenberg says. "If I were to throw a blanket of aluminum edging installation in a typical situation, it's going to usually be roughly \$5.75-to \$6.25-lineal-foot installed," he says.

And on the contractor side, it's not highly profitable, Vandenberg says. He can't put a number on how profitable the service actually is for the company because that depends on those variables mentioned before. McDonnell Landscape is a commercial landscape contractor, and it mainly uses edging products to separate either lawn areas and planting beds or gravel and soil areas on green roofs.

The Brookeville, Md.-based company sees about a 7 percent net profit off edging, says Jon Fritz, vice president.



"There is a little extra incurred cost involved when I retrofit aluminum edging, but if the budget doesn't allow for it now, it is something that can be deferred."

- KIRK VANDENBERG, LANDSCAPE DESIGNER AND SALESMAN, KATERBERG VERHAGE

If a project calls for edging, it's already in the blueprints from the landscape architect, Fritz says. But nowadays, because of costs, many commercial projects are sticking to the natural look. "If you just have a landscape bed and then sod, you just leave a naturalized edge," he says. "It's only when you get into stuff like structure or oriental gardens would be when you use edging."

One of the main times McDonnell Landscape uses edging is for drip edges, "We put gravel edges around buildings. They're called drip edges," Fritz says. "It's like a foot of gravel along the edge so that water, when it comes off the roof, doesn't splatter mud all against the building."

While edging might not fit in everyone's budget these days, one of the main selling points Vandenberg uses is that it's not something that needs to be replaced often, he says.

If a client still isn't biting or just can't afford it, Vandenberg tells them they can always install it later.

"There is a little extra incurred cost involved when I retrofit aluminum edging, but if the budget doesn't allow for it now, it is something that can be deferred," he says.

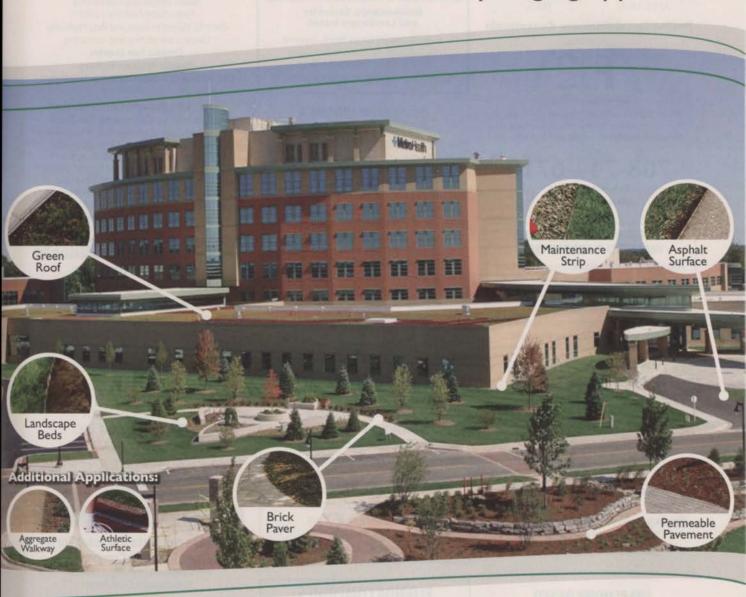
"And most often we do it later, and we get great results. People say, 'Oh, it's so much nicer."

The author is an associate editor at Lawn & Landscape. She can be reached at clawell@gie.net.





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MARCH 2012



Joe CEO, ArtisTree Landscape Maintenance & Design Gonzalez

here's a first time for everything - the first sale, the first expansion, the first mistake and maybe even the first award. To help gain insight into the successes and lessons learned by successful business owners, every month Lawn & Landscape will talk to companies who have surpassed those milestones and have become some of the newest members of the Top 100 List.

COMPANY: ArtisTree Landscape Maintenance & Design

LOCATION: Venice, Fla. **TOP 100 RANKING: 96**

2010 REVENUES: \$13 million



What about your company has remained consistent?

We've always had a singleminded objective, which is to be a representative in this industry of the highest quality company of our position. I'm not a horticultural person; I don't have a horticultural background.

My background is in business and the businesses that I've worked for are high-end, high-quality oriented companies.

That's what I thought that this industry needed - someone to be the quality leader in the area.

You just don't start out at the top; you hopefully wind up at the top. There's always more you can do, there's new ideas all the time. You're never done.

Did you plan to grow your company this big?

I moved down here with two babies in diapers, and I

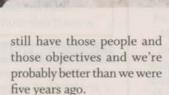
knew I needed to make some money. I was just hoping I could get it off the ground and make it into a few-million-dollar business, A \$15 million business was not in my sights at that time.

There was really nothing in my sights except making an immediate living and doing it as quickly as possible.

I think at the point where we passed \$2.5 million and \$3 million is when I thought of the distinct possibility of us getting bigger, still \$15 million wasn't a reality for

When I got to \$10 million, right before the turn of the economy, is when my business got really excited on growth. That's when I was looking at a \$25-50 million dollar business.

So, when the economy rolls around, it might be a slower plan, but I plan to grow this business at 10 to 15 percent growth rate. We



To what do you attribute your

I think we have been unflinching in our objective to be the quality company.

During the hard times we have never cut back on anything. If we make a mistake, or we don't meet a customer's expectation, we'll rectify it at a loss.

I think the fact that we have stood by that standard for the last 20 years is what has kept us growing and moving forward.

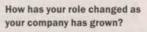
How do you avoid getting complacent?

I think I keep myself moving in multiple directions. I have a group of people working for me that have a very good skill level of the day-to-day operations of the company, and I don't have those skills.

What I do have is a focus on growth and new opportunities, marketing, the things that are changing day to day.

I hire marketing and sales department employees who are giving me challenges every day, and they are hardworking, motivated people.

I think we inspire each other.



My role has been diminished over time because as we've grown we've added a marketing department and other departments to take over some of the duties I had.

I made our first brochure. for example. But now I'm basically on a part-time status here, overseeing what other people are doing for the most part, and I don't put more into it than I need to.

What advice would you give to leaders on growing?

I would say you have to find your niche. It has to fit your personality.

You need to have financial backing. It's very hard to make it in this business - it's highly competitive so the margins are very slim unless you establish yourself, and that has been the objective.

You have to have the ability to offer more services at a higher price for more profitability, but also to live with that profit you're promising.

I think business leaders should adopt a philosophy and stick with it. Do they want to be the cheapest guy or the highest priced guy? Do you want to be the best or do you want to be in the middle? You have to pick your market and stick with it. L&L

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