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The Incentives GUIDE

FROM SNOW BONUSES TO LASER TAG, find out how businesses are creating friendly rivalries among coworkers to keep their drive alive.

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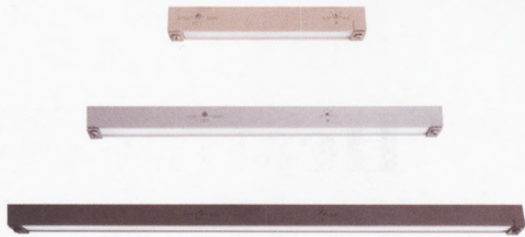
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COVER STORY

Healthy competition

Contests create friendly rivalries
among coworkers and keep the drive
alive at Green Lawn Fertilizing.

Cover photo illustration by Carly Bartel • Illustration: © Alex Eben Meyer



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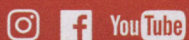
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Google overhaul

The tech giant has overhauled its famous search to show more pictures, videos and context.

By Matt McClellan

GOOGLE HAS ROLLED OUT a host of updates to its search product. The updates are designed to make visual information more useful as pictures and video become more central to the Internet experience.

The new features showing up in searches include introductory videos about public figures, topic videos to help users plan trips or learn about new subjects, and an overhaul of its ranking system for displaying image-based searches, offering users more context and easier ways to shop online.

Businesses can leverage these changes to their benefit by integrating photos, videos, online reviews and more into Google's "My Business" page.

Posting through Google My Business lets you publish your events, products,

and services directly to Google Search and Maps. By creating posts, you can place your timely text, video, or photo content in front of customers when they find your business listing on Google.

Your business profile appears right when people are searching for your business or businesses like yours on Google Search and Maps. Creating a Google My Business ([google.com/business](https://www.google.com/business)) page is free, and you can update your Business Profile with it so you can stand out and bring customers in.

Once you set it up, you can learn how customers are interacting with your Business Profile. It's similar to Google Analytics, but tailored to your specific business. It's also designed to be much less overwhelming. While many data scientists are

The latest round of updates rolled out by Google could make it easier for users to connect with your company online.

devoted to analytics' ability to handle any deep dive, the sheer amount of variables involved is enough to frustrate those without a statistics degree. Head to bit.ly/GoogleOverhaul for the rest of the story.

SOCIAL MEDIA

Join the conversation on LinkedIn! We've started a new page to share magazine content and better engage with our audience. Join here: bit.ly/20ISnYo

INSTAGRAM

On Instagram, we like to highlight our travels and the events we get to attend. Last month, we got some hands-on time with Husqvarna's newest chainsaws in Asheville, North Carolina. [@lawnlandscape](https://www.instagram.com/lawnlandscape)

TWITTER

It's officially spring! Tweet us a picture of your crews ready for the busy season. [@lawnlandscape](https://twitter.com/lawnlandscape)

LISTEN UP!

Lawn & Landscape Radio Network's latest episode highlights Charles Ellis. A horticulture course he took while serving time in an Ohio correctional facility inspired him to start his own company. bit.ly/LLRadioNetwork

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Brian Horn

Editor | Lawn & Landscape

You may not be able to pay for your workers to go on a Disney trip, but stocking free snacks and drinks at your dispatch area is something that you have a better chance of working into the budget.

Bees and honey

There are two things I recall about my sixth-grade teacher, Mr. Fischer. One, he had an uncanny resemblance to country star Garth Brooks (in his younger days since this was the early 90s). Two, what he'd do if you missed a homework assignment.

On those days we had homework due, he'd go desk to desk to see if you completed your work the correct way. If you did, he'd just move on.

If you didn't, he'd yell "BLACK!" That was to let everyone know that you would be getting the oh-so embarrassing black spot by your name on the homework chart hanging on the wall.

I was always envious of the kids who could laugh it off when they got the black spot treatment. But as someone who would feel queasy if I missed any homework assignment at that age, I was not one who saw humor in the public humiliation.

I bring up Mr. Fischer because of our cover story this month on incentives.

Mr. Fischer chose the fear and punishment method, and I guess that can work, but the stories we tell this month are of contractors who want to reward actions as simple as arriving to work on time. Instead of driving productivity by

punishment, these companies subscribe to the "more bees with honey" approach.

I understand that you are supposed to do your homework and I probably sound like a whiny Millennial (even though I think I just miss being born in the millennial era) and shouldn't necessarily be rewarded for it.

But there's still some merit to giving kudos to those who consistently meet requirements and go above and beyond, instead of always implementing some sort of punishment when goals aren't met.

While we cover some larger companies in this package, you don't need to be a multi-million dollar operation to implement these incentives.

You may not be able to pay for your workers to go on a Disney trip, but stocking free snacks and drinks at your dispatch area is something that you have a better chance of working into the budget. Or, a little bonus for arriving on time every day for a month might go a long way to solving morning roll-out issues.

Awarding workers for arriving on time may seem ridiculous to some. But with the labor pool so thin, if there is an issue you can fix without having to look for new employees, does it really matter if it seems ridiculous? — *Brian Horn*

Lawn & Landscape

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FORD DEBUTS 2020 F-SERIES SUPER DUTY PICKUPS



Landscapers were on an advisory board that recommended changes like an improved gas engine and trailer backup assist. **By Jimmy Miller**

DETROIT – Ford is adding massive 7.3-liter gas engines and modern technological upgrades to its newest vehicles in the F-Series Super Duty pickup truck line, the company announced at a press event in January.

The new vehicles, set to hit the market later this fall, can be powered by the all-new V8 gas engine and a new 10-speed automatic transmission. Customers can also choose a 6.7-liter diesel engine or the standard 6.2-liter gas V8 once the trucks hit dealerships.

“The 7.3-liter V8 hits a sweet spot, we believe, for the customer,” said Dave Filipe, vice president for Ford’s powertrain engineer-

ing. “It (has) the right balance to give you more torque and maximum torque at the low speeds, and we’re going to make it compatible so that it works well within an F-250 Super Duty all the way up to an F-750. That’s so important to our fleet customers.”

The vehicles also feature enhanced technology like Pro Trailer Backup Assist to help drivers navigate tight spaces for all types of trailer styles, such as fifth-wheel and goose-neck trailers.

The pickups also include an embedded 4G LTE modem standard across every Super Duty, which will provide Wi-Fi access for up

to 10 devices. The trucks will have wireless charging and USB-C ports as well.

The technology isn’t just for convenience and comfort – safety features like lane-keeping alerts will also notify the driver if they’re veering outside yellow lines. The trucks will again feature a Blind Spot Information System with trailer coverage and Pre-Collision Assist.

“When your truck is your livelihood, it’s not just yourself you’re protecting – you’re protecting your assets,” said Michael Pruitt, Super Duty chief engineer.

Pruitt also said there were a handful of landscape contractors on Ford’s 25-person



A 7.3-LITER GAS ENGINE IS AVAILABLE
FOR FORD'S F-SERIES SUPER DUTY LINE



Fleet Advisory Board, which features a cross-section of Ford commercial customers. Their feedback helped identify what the F-Series trucks had been missing in previous years, as well as features other trucks had that were ideal for landscapers.

"Sometimes in that landscaping area, you've got a pretty healthy trailer in the back," Pruitt said. "Negotiating those trailers in driveways or where you've got to go can be a big task. I think our (backup assist) will be a big help, and of course, any time we're bringing more power and more capability to those guys, that's more they can put on that trailer. That's work efficiency."

Other features on the new Super Duty trucks include an electronically controlled transmission that allows drivers to pick drive modes like slippery, tow/haul, eco, deep sand and snow. There's also an enhanced high-airflow grille on the front of the vehicles to improve powertrain cooling and new LED headlamps.

"We're fortifying our truck lineup. We're doing so with more power, more capability, more efficiency, no compromises," said Kumar Galhotra, president of Ford North America. "Today's story is all about work: How do we help our customers be more productive in their work, be more efficient in their work?"

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Ryan Johnson will work out of the Fort Wayne, Indiana, office as vice president of sales-US/Canada for the North America Water Systems Business Unit.

Franklin Electric named Ryan Johnson as the new vice president of sales-US/Canada for the North America Water Systems (NAWS) Business Unit. Johnson will manage all

**JOHNSON**

aspects of sales activities for the US and Canada markets. The company, which manufactures Little Giant water pumps, was founded in 1944.

Johnson has 20 years of industry experience in motors, sales and management, spending his entire career with Regal Beloit and General Electric. His background includes expertise in marketing, Six Sigma, operations, and in every aspect of the sales process, from direct field sales experience to sales management leadership.

“Ryan brings a proven track record of building strategies and sales teams focused on providing its customers with clear, differentiating value,” said Don Kenney, president, North America Water Systems and Vice President of Franklin Electric. “He is an operationally driven customer advocate that brings a fresh perspective being previously outside of the company. He has Midwest values, and understands the importance of building and managing fair and mutually beneficial partnerships. I have no doubt that Ryan brings the innovative outlook needed to support our progressing efforts as an organization.”



Husqvarna debuted new chainsaws and climbing safety equipment in Asheville, North Carolina.

HUSQVARNA DEBUTS NEWEST CHAINSAWS

The 572 XP and the 565 are new saws that highlight a series of products the company released in Asheville.

By Jimmy Miller

ASHEVILLE, N.C. – On the same grounds where the nation's first forestry school was founded, Husqvarna officially introduced its five newest chainsaws to the North American market.

The entirely new 572 XP and 565 saws, as well as the updated 550 XP Mark II, 545 Mark II and T525, all feature higher cutting speeds and cutting capacities of their Husqvarna predecessors. The 572 XP and 565 also include improved AutoTune technology, which adjusts its carburetor based on air and fuel conditions every tenth of a second.

Husqvarna also debuted a new line of Arborist Essentials and its C83, C85 and S93G

X-Cut chains. The essentials pack includes new helmets designed for Class C or Class E use, as well as other basic equipment necessary for line setting and climbing. Meanwhile, the C83 (.050 gauge) and C85 (.058 gauge) are 3/8-inch full chisel chains, while the S93G is a semi-chisel chain. All three of the products are expansions to the preexisting X-Cut Series.

"Our commitment is to always deliver products that are relevant to our end users and provide the necessary productivity," said Per Kvarby, Husqvarna's global director of product management. "At the end of the day, it's about productivity. How much

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money can I earn as a professional user cutting down trees?"

Kvarby said the company weighed the needs of clients involved in both harvest forestry and

urban forestry. Whereas many clients are still buying chainsaws for logging, Kvarby said more tree care specialists are keeping healthy green spaces within growing, urban cities.

With that in mind, Kvarby said the decision to create a variety in saws is because of the divergent needs of customers. Both the 572 XP and 565 are in the 70cc engine class, but the 572 XP is specifically designed for clients who require more power in the forestry segment. For users who don't need quite as much power and more maneuverability, the 565 may be best.

The 550 XP Mark II and 545 Mark II are redesigned from their previous versions and are best used on mid-sized trees, though the 545 offers slightly less power than the 550. The T525, the latest installment in Husqvarna's compact chainsaw line, is ideal for limbing jobs, as it features an easy connect to a climbing harness and is the company's lightest gas-powered chainsaw to date.

"We are proud to provide the latest, state-of-the-art technology any innovative solutions to both our harvest forestry customers as well as our urban forestry customers," Kvarby said. "(The saws are) specifically customized for that end user."

Christian Johnsson, the company's product management specialist, said Husqvarna considered six main areas when designing its new saws: cutting capacity, cooling capacity, air filtration system, improving AutoTune, power-to-weight ratio and cutting speed. The company upgraded its heat shields, air filters, and cylinder cooling technologies, plus added wear-resistant felling marks to help guide users during cuts. The AutoTune feature on some of the saws is also an improvement over previous iterations, as Husqvarna's AutoTune used to adjust the saw's carburetor once every second rather than once every .10 seconds.

"You could hear when it adjusts, but with these saws, it happens so fast you can't even hear it," Johnsson said. "To be able to take (our saws), develop them further, is quite impressive."

The new 572 XP is available now for \$999.95 MSRP, while the new 565 can be purchased for \$939.95. The 545 Mark II is listed at \$539.95 and the 550 XP Mark II is at \$599.95. The T525 is available for \$489.95.



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LANDSCAPE WORKSHOP ACQUIRES BAYOU LAWN & LANDSCAPE SERVICES

Landscape Workshop has acquired certain assets of Bayou Lawn & Landscape Services (Bayou) based in Valparaiso, Florida. With this expansion to the Emerald Coast, Landscape Workshop will now have 10 branch locations throughout the Southeast.

Bayou was originally founded by Matt Schwab in 1995 before Jim Allen purchased the company in 1999. In addition to commercial landscape maintenance, Bayou's client portfolio also includes a variety of residential properties along the Emerald Coast and surrounding areas.

After much deliberation by Allen, and with his impending retirement on the horizon, he decided to sell the company and certain Bayou assets to Landscape Workshop due to its reputation and 35-year record of professionalism. Allen plans to stay on board throughout the transition period, and Bayou's Bruce Kennedy will join the Landscape Workshop team as an account manager.

Investment bank Benchmark International and the Anchors Smith Grimsley law firm represented Bayou in the transaction.


ASPEN GROVE LANDSCAPE GROUP ACQUIRES LONG BROTHERS LANDSCAPING

Aspen Grove Landscape Group acquired Long Brothers Landscaping, a family-owned business with more than three decades of experience.

Located in Raleigh, North Carolina, Long Brothers serves the Triangle and Triad regions and is the second North Carolina company that Aspen Grove has acquired.

"We are thrilled to bring in Long Brothers to the Aspen Grove family of landscape companies," said Aspen Grove President David Fleischner. "They are aligned with our mission and values of having the best support via the resources of our nationwide organization, combined with their dedicated expertise on a regional level. At Aspen Grove, we encourage communication and partnerships."

"Our business was founded on the prin-

 **"OUR BUSINESS WAS FOUNDED
ON THE PRINCIPLES OF HARD WORK
AND DEDICATION, AND WE COULDN'T BE
HAPPIER TO BE JOINING ASPEN GROVE."**

Stephen Wilson, Long Brothers Landscaping,
VP of operations

ciples of hard work and dedication, and we couldn't be happier to be joining Aspen Grove," said Stephen Wilson, Long Brothers Landscaping vice president of operations. "We look forward to working together to provide optimal performance for our customers in the Raleigh and surrounding regions."

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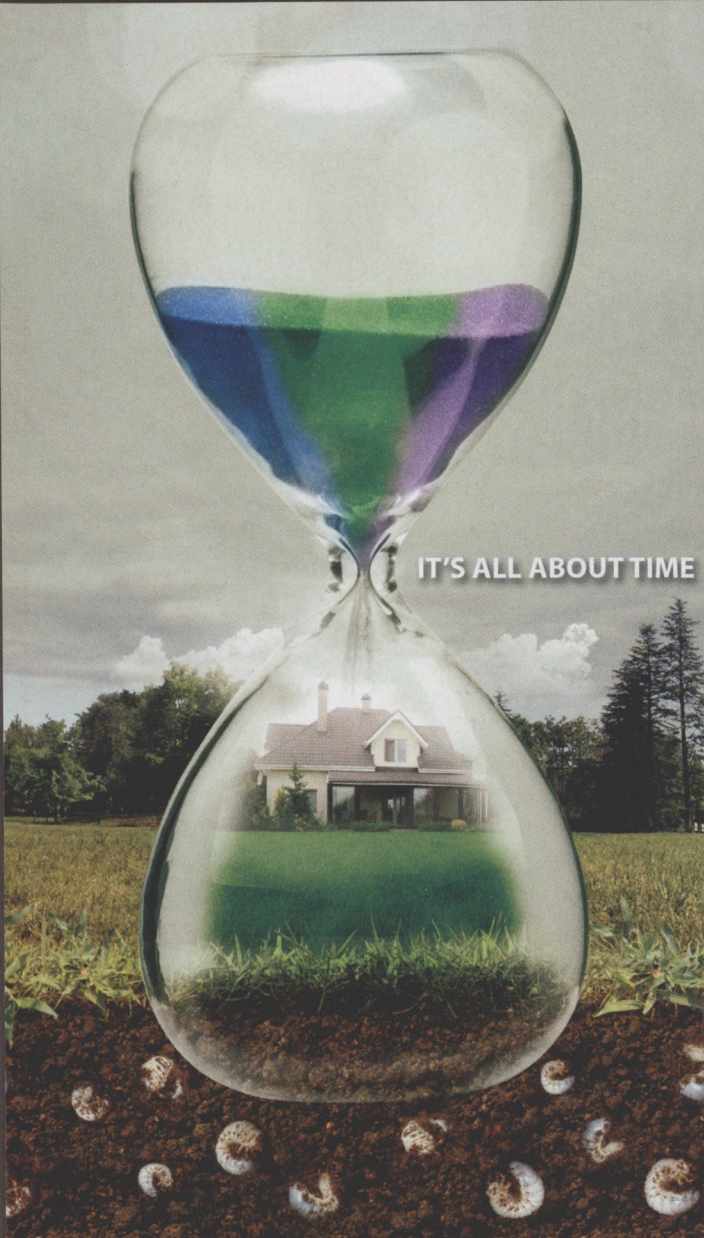
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DAVID J. FRANK LANDSCAPE HIRES JOESTGEN AS COO

The company's founder passed away in February.

David J. Frank Landscape Contracting has hired John Joestgen to its newly created position of chief operating officer.

David J. Frank, the company's founder and CEO, passed away in February. His company ranked No. 77 on Lawn & Landscape's list of Top 100 companies in 2018. He was 69 years old.

Lawn & Landscape will have more on Frank's life in a future issue of the magazine.

Joestgen has over 30 years of experience in the landscape industry, more than 20 of those in an executive capacity. As an Illinois-based executive vice president and chief operating officer, Joestgen was in charge of maintenance, construction, irrigation and snow operations for up to five branches.

These companies stretched from Milwaukee to Chicago to Indianapolis, with annual revenues exceeding \$25 million.

Joestgen graduated from the University of Wisconsin-Madison with degrees in Landscape Architecture and Ornamental Horticulture.

Immediately after graduation, Joestgen started working as a field superintendent and estimator on large-scale commercial landscape

projects in Chicago, Boston, Philadelphia, and Orlando.

His list of credentials include landscape industry certified professional, certified arborist, certified snow professional, and his 30-Hour Occupational Safety and Health Administration certification.

In addition, Joestgen has lent his expertise to the Illinois Green Industry Advisory Committee and the board of directors for the Illinois Turfgrass Foundation, among others.

He also has worked as a consultant for various municipalities, companies and individuals.

It's been estimated that roughly 50,000 trees have been planted under Joestgen's supervision. His understanding of tree biology, soils and fertilization, construction, maintenance, and sustainability led him to teach these five subjects as an adjunct instructor at Triton College.

"We are pleased to have some of John's caliber join our team of experts," President David R. Frank said. "His experience will be integral in guiding our next generation of leaders to ensure our future success."

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DAYBREAKER LANDSCAPES OWNER WINS CASE CONTEST GRAND PRIZE

Jeff Rausch was selected as the winner of the 2019 Kickstart Landscape Business Development contest.

CASE Construction Equipment has announced Daybreaker Landscapes of Union, Illinois, as the grand prize winner of the 2019 Kickstart Landscape Business Development contest.

CASE Kickstart is a business development contest in which landscaping contractors throughout North America can win a suite of prizes aimed at improving both their technical work and their business practices.

Jeff Rausch of Daybreaker Landscapes was selected as the winner. The company specializes in full landscape and hardscape installation, lawn care and snow removal in Northern Illinois.

Daybreaker Landscapes was founded in 2010 after Rausch served four years in the Air Force.

As part of the package, Rausch will get:

- A six-month lease on any CASE compact track loader paired with a CASE laser grading box with SiteControl.
- A yearlong consultation with Ken Thomas and Ben Gandy of Envisor Consulting.
- A full set of (6) Crusader Hammer Tools by Pave Tech, Inc.
- Fleet management consultation and recommendations from CASE staff throughout 2019.
- Custom-branded CASE apparel/uniforms for staff.
- Up to five passes to GIE+EXPO 2019 in Louisville, Kentucky.

"The package that CASE has put together matching equipment with business consultation is exactly what I need at this stage in my business development," Rausch said. "I started this business with no capital, no equipment – just a company name, a dream to be my own boss, and a strong desire for success."

Business owners entered the contest by answering basic questions about their operation. For more information, visit CaseCE.com/landscaping.

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H-2B LOTTERY SYSTEM MODIFIED FOR APPLICATIONS THIS JULY

OFLC wants feedback on this procedural change that takes the start date and filing date into heavier consideration.

The U.S. Department of Labor recently announced updates to its procedures for processing H-2B applications.

Because of the intense competition for H-2B visas in recent years, there have been challenges to handle the increasingly large volume of H-2B applications filed on January 1 of each year. As a result of stakeholder comments and the most recent filing period in which the iCERT electronic filing system crashed due to the large volume of system user requests, the Office of Foreign Labor and Certification (OFLC) reassessed its procedures for processing H-2B applications.

OFLC announced that all H-2B applications filed on or after July 3, 2019 will be randomly ordered for processing based on the date of filing and the start date of work requested. OFLC will randomly order and process all of the H-2B applications request-



ALL H-2B APPLICATIONS FILED ON OR AFTER JULY 3, 2019 WILL BE RANDOMLY ORDERED FOR PROCESSING BASED ON THE DATE OF FILING AND THE START DATE OF WORK REQUESTED.

ing the earliest start date of work permitted under the semi-annual visa allocation (i.e., Oct. 1 or April 1) and filed during the first three calendar days of the regulatory time period for filing H-2B applications. Once first actions are issued, OFLC will randomly assign for processing all other H-2B applications filed on a single calendar day.

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SCOTTS MIRACLE-GRO SELLS OWNERSHIP STAKE IN TRUGREEN

The Scotts Miracle-Gro Company sold its approximate 30 percent stake in TruGreen to the majority owner in a transaction in which ScottsMiracle-Gro received approximately \$234 million.

In 2016, the company contributed its wholly owned subsidiary, Scotts LawnService, into a joint venture with TruGreen. Seventy percent of the joint venture was owned by the private equity firm Clayton Dublier & Rice, its co-investors and TruGreen management, with the balance owned by ScottsMiracle-Gro.

In addition to the sale, ScottsMiracle-Gro also received cash proceeds of another \$18.4 million in connection with the assignment to a third party of debt of the joint venture held by the company. The combined proceeds, approximately \$120 to \$140 million on an after-tax basis, will immediately be ap-

plied to reduce the Company's indebtedness.

Upon the creation of the joint venture, ScottsMiracle-Gro received an approximate \$200 million tax deferred dividend. In 2017, it received another tax-deferred dividend of approximately \$90 million. Those two payments were essentially equal to the initial valuation placed on Scotts LawnService when the joint venture was established.

"Shareholder value was clearly maximized by the creation of this JV and now our divestiture of this investment," said Randy Coleman, chief financial officer. "Using these proceeds to reduce our debt should allow us to lower our debt-to-EBITDA ratio below 4.0 by the end of fiscal 2019 and to 3.5 times debt-to-EBITDA by the end of 2020. At that level, management would once again begin to explore options to proactively return more cash to shareholders."



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ITEM# ART20

The promotion and expansion is part of Eastern Land Management's multi-year strategic investment.

Eastern Land Management, a commercial landscape and winter snow/ice services firm that's been in business for more than 40 years, has opened a 6-acre, 20,000 sq.-ft. campus in Monroe, Connecticut.

In conjunction with the new facility, ELM promoted Greg Gross to associate branch manager of the ELM Monroe branch. He will report directly to company president Bruce Moore Jr.

"Promoting from within yields great results," Moore Jr. said. "Cultivating talented and motivated employees internally and advancing them when the time is right has long been a part of ELM's great place to work culture."


The expansion is part of ELM's multi-year strategic investment. The campus will serve as a hub for its winter operations and will house ELM's new zero-emission, all-electric fleet.

In addition, the site will include safe and sustainable salt storage, an eco-friendly brine-making facility and a fleet of specialized vehicles and equipment.

This equipment is for anti-icing pretreatment, snow removal and post-storm liquid applications during winter weather events.

"Last year, we committed to dramatically take our green game up a notch," Moore Jr. said. "With a special focus on alternative fuels and less harmful approaches, we hope to make ELM a leader in sustainability and value creation."

Moore Jr. is currently leading the Monroe roll-out, with Gross driving day-to-day operations.

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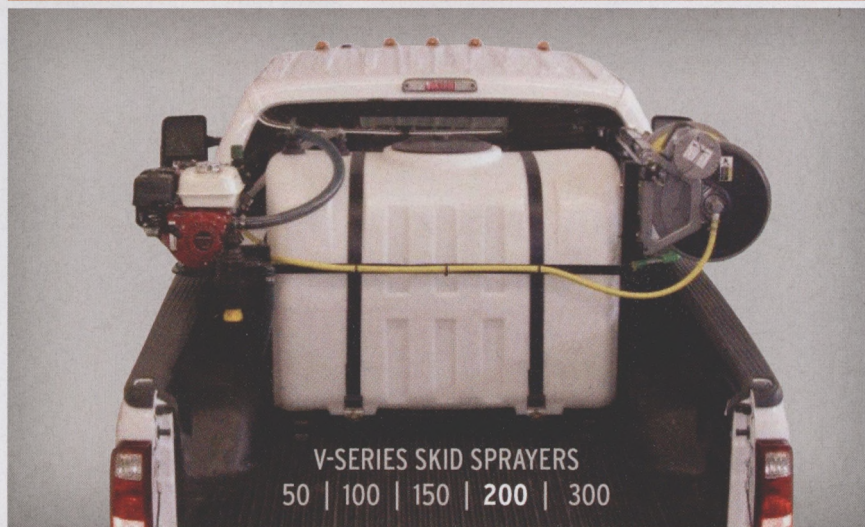
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The Aspire Software Company, a business management software company, has received an investment from Mainsail Partners, a San Francisco-based growth equity firm.

The company plans to use the capital to accelerate product development and expand its team.

"This is an exciting time for us. Our strategy of delivering game changing solutions for our customers remains as strong as ever," said Mark Tipton, co-founder and co-CEO of Aspire.

"We believe this partnership with Mainsail will allow us to execute even better," said Kevin Kehoe, co-founder and co-CEO of Aspire. "We have built a great team who are dedicated to helping our clients navigate and prosper in a rapidly changing business environment by providing them with the tools and practices essential to success."

Aspire was founded in 2014 and offers a comprehensive system, which includes estimating, proposals, CRM, scheduling, purchasing, time reporting and payroll. It also features job costing, labor forecasting, invoicing and reporting.

This February, Aspire released Version 5.0 of the software featuring a payments platform and customer portal allowing contractors to accept online payments from customers, as well as Fleetsharp – a GPS tracking system enabling comprehensive fleet and shop management.

"The Aspire team of nearly 50 professionals have built a great system that is enabling landscapers to grow their businesses with automation," said Jason Payne, managing partner at Mainsail Partners. "We believe that the industry is underinvested in technology and that systems like Aspire's with a customer-centric approach are in an attractive position to help contractors grow profitably while navigating the competitive market dynamics."

Aspire currently has more than 29,000 users in over 750 locations in the U.S. and Canada. Payne and Jason Frankel, vice president at Mainsail, will join Tipton and Kehoe on the company's board of directors.

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GREENWORKS RELEASES NEW MOWER

Greenworks Commercial released its new 25-inch Brushless Self-Propelled Lawn Mower. Powered by the brand's 82V recyclable lithium-ion battery, this product is designed for landscapers, turf management crews and lawn care professionals.

The brushless engine is powered on with the push of a button. Equipped with Smart Cut technology, the GMS 250 mower adjusts speed as necessary to improve performance and extend run time. The dual port battery sequential power supply

automatically switches from one battery to another, delivering greater operating time without interruption.

Some of the increased efficiency and power-focused features of the tool include:

- 7-position single lever height adjustment for a diverse range of cutting heights - 1 3/8 to 3
- Three-quarter-inch 25-inch Steel Deck with 2-in-1 design for mulch and rear bag capability
- Dual blades for increased

cutting performance

- Rear wheel driving system for easy operation
- 2-year battery warranty
- 2-year tool warranty

"Our GMS 250 82-volt lithium-ion Self Propelled Mower will help landscape pros overcome the growing issues of dealing with emission and noise regulations, saving their businesses both time and money," said Tony Marchese, commercial business unit leader, Americas – Greenworks.

"In fact, with the powerful performance of this self-



propelled 25-inch mower, we've given landscape crews the ability to get all their trimming, finishing and severe sloped-terrain work done in a quiet, hassle-free manner that won't disturb clients in their homes or work places, enhancing the customer experience."

The Greenworks Commercial GMS 250 25" 82-V Self-Propelled Mower is available now through independent dealer networks.

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HINO TRUCKS APPOINTS NEW PRESIDENT

Hino Trucks announced Shige-
hiro Matsuoka was appointed
President and Chief Executive
Officer of Hino North America
effective Feb. 1, 2019. Matsuoka
succeeds Yoshinori Noguchi
who will step down after a
tenure as president and CEO.
Noguchi will remain as an ex-
ecutive advisor through March
to ensure a smooth transition.

Under Noguchi's leadership
for the past six years, Hino
grew its dealer base by nearly 20
percent, launched its Connected
Vehicle Strategy and Certi-

fied Ultimate dealer program,
built a corporate office in Novi,
Michigan and purchased a new
manufacturing facility in Mineral
Wells, West Virginia.

"On behalf of the entire dealer
network, we would like to thank
Noguchi for his leadership and
action over the past six years,"
said Tim Matheny, president of
Matheny Motors and chairman
of Hino Trucks' National Dealer
Advisory Council.

Matsuoka joined Hino in 1981
and has held various overseas as-
signments in his 38-year career

with Hino. Most recently, he
was responsible for total support
strategy and technical solutions,
aftersales service, parts operations,
and global production and parts
logistics divisions for Hino Mo-
tors Limited.

"This is an important time
of transformation for Hino
as we expand into the Class 8
market, advance our connected
vehicle strategy, elevate customer
ownership experience and build
on Hino's presence in the U.S.
market," said Matsuoka. "I am
honored to have this opportu-

nity to lead the Hino Trucks
team and further strengthen our
commitment to continuous im-
provement and widen our range
of product offerings."

An initial focus for Mat-
suoka is the launch execution
of the new Class 7 and 8 A09
powered Hino XL7 and XL8
series trucks – first introduced
in Spring 2018 – nearly ready to
enter mass production at Hino
Trucks new facility in Mineral
Wells, West Virginia.

"We are looking forward to
Matsuoka's strong leadership in
continuing the growth of Hino
Trucks which has been predi-
cated on world-class customer
experience," Matheny said.

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KEELING NAMED NALP INTERIM CEO

The board of directors of the National Association of Landscape Professionals placed Carol Keeling in the role of interim CEO.

Keeling succeeds Sabeena Hickman, who served as CEO of the association for more than a decade before announcing her resignation earlier this month to pursue other opportunities. Keeling will begin her new role effective immediately. She will also continue to serve as vice president of finance and administration, a role she has held since she joined NALP in 2007.

"We are extremely fortunate to have someone with as much leadership and industry experience as Carol at the helm during this transition period," said Jeff Buhler, NALP president. "In her nearly 12 years with the association, Carol has skillfully and strategically overseen the financial, human resources and information technology areas of NALP. Our board has the utmost confidence in her abilities to keep NALP on

track for the future and ensure a smooth transition of leadership while a thorough, national search for a permanent chief executive is conducted."

Buhler said Keeling helped manage the post-financial merger of the Associated Landscape Contractors of America and the Professional Lawn Care Association of America to become the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). She also helped later navigate the association's rebranding and name change from PLANET to NALP, and she implemented two fiscal year changes.

"I'm honored to have the opportunity to serve the professional landscape industry in this expanded capacity," Keeling said. "I am looking forward to working with our talented staff and dedicated board to continue to carry out on the association's mission of serving our members and ensuring the long-term growth and stability of NALP. The association has a strong future ahead."

Prior to joining NALP, Keeling spent more than a decade as an accounting and tax consultant in northern Virginia. She has also held corporate accounting positions with Rockresorts in Boca Raton, Florida, and Marriott International in Bethesda, Maryland and previously worked as a certified public accountant for several firms in the Pittsburgh area.



**KEELING HELPED NAVIGATE
THE ASSOCIATION'S
REBRANDING AND NAME CHANGE
FROM PLANET TO NALP.**

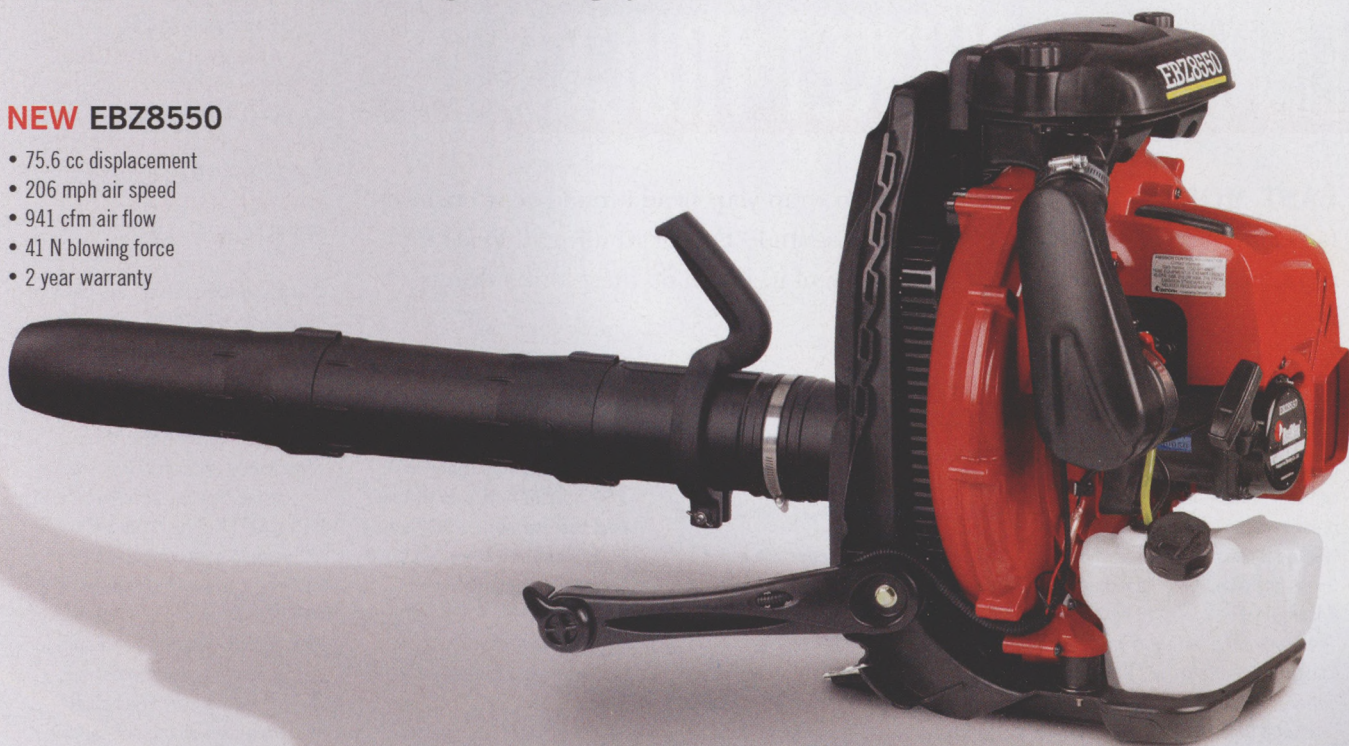
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follows Jim Huston around the country as he visits with landscapers and helps them understand their numbers to make smarter decisions.

BEPs AND BUCKET TRUCKS

- **LAST MONTH I DISCUSSED** how to wrap your head around your business to ensure its profitability and the three essential “Ps” for running it. Price it right, produce it right and produce enough of it. If you do these three things, you’re going to make money.

He wanted to determine how much revenue a three-man general tree work crew should produce per day to generate either a 10 or 20 percent net profit margin as well as his break-even point (BEP). He particularly wanted to know his BEP so that if things got slow, he could reduce his price but still cover all of his costs.

Here are the formulas we will use to determine the crew’s BEP and net profit margins:

- **Total Direct Costs + General & Administrative (G&A) Overhead Costs = BEP**
- **Price – BEP = Net Profit Margin (NPM)**

CALCULATING CREW DAY-RATE AND MAN-HOUR RATE FOR A THREE-PERSON GTW CREW. Our climber makes \$27 per man-hour. The two groundsmen earn \$21 and \$15 per man-hour. This calculates to be a crew average wage (CAW) of \$21. They work 45 man-hours each per week.



JIM HUSTON
runs J.R. Huston Consulting, a green industry consulting firm.

Adding a 5.6 percent overtime factor and a 10 percent risk factor to the \$21 CAW we get \$24.27. Labor burden (payroll taxes, workers compensation and general liability insurance, paid time off, etc.) is 35 percent. The bucket truck has a replacement cost of \$125,000 and should last 15 years. It should cost roughly \$8,000 per year to maintain, be billed a minimum of 1,000 hours per year, accumulate 15,000 miles per year and get about 5 miles per gallon. Add these all up and we reach a cost per hour (CPH) of roughly \$27. Its cost per hour (CPH) is calculated as follows:

- $((\$125,000 + (15 \text{ yrs} \times \$8,000))) \div 15,000 \text{ lifetime hours} = (\$245,000 \div 15,000) = \$16.33$
- $15 \text{ yrs} \times 15,000 \text{ miles} =$

225,000 lifetime miles

- $225,000 \text{ miles} \div 5 \text{ mpg} = 45,000 \text{ gallons}$
- $45,000 \times \$3.50 \text{ per gallon} = \$157,500 \text{ lifetime cost of fuel}$
- $\text{Fuel cost per hour} = \$157,500 \div 15,000 \text{ lifetime hours} = \10.50
- The total CPH of the bucket truck is $\$16.33 + \$10.50 = \$26.83$
- We’ll round up to a total cost per hour of **\$27.00**

Without going through all the calculations, we’ll use a CPH for the chipper of \$35, a CPH of \$8 for the chain saws and a CPH of \$20 for the F-800. To calculate our BEP, we’ll use a general and administrative (G&A) overhead cost per man-hour (OPH) of \$20.00. We’ll then add both 10 and 20 percent net profit margins (NPM) to our break-even point (see below to find out how it works).

ANALYSIS. This three-person GTW crew needs to generate a minimum

of \$2,600 per day every day of the week to generate a 20 percent net profit margin. To achieve a ten percent NPM, it would have to generate \$2,326 per day. The hourly rates are as follows:

TOTAL DIRECT COST (TDC) PER MAN-HOUR

$\$1,533.41 \div 28 = \54.76

BREAK-EVEN POINT (BEP) PER MAN-HOUR

$\$2,093.41 \div 28 = \74.76

10% NPM PER MAN-HOUR

$\$2,325.87 \div 28 = \83.07

20% NPM PER MAN-HOUR

$\$2,616.76 \div 28 = \93.46

CONCLUSION. Roger now has the tools to price his work competitively and accurately. He has a profitable bidding envelope, so to speak, between \$2,300 and \$2,600 (roughly \$75 to \$85 per man-hour). If he consistently prices his GTW crew at \$2,500 per day (plus or minus \$100), he’ll cover all of his costs and make between 10 to 20 percent net profit. If sales get slow, he could lower his price to near his BEP of roughly \$2,100 per day or \$75 per man-hour.

Knowing your numbers and understanding how you arrived at them makes all the difference when it comes to pricing your work confidently. It gives you the assurance that each day you work, you’re making money. Calculating and establishing daily revenue benchmarks for all of your crews is critical if you’re going to operate a profitable business ... and sleep at night!

Note: If you’d like a copy of the MS Excel worksheet, email Huston at the address below. **L&L**

Contact Jim Huston
at jhuston@giemedia.com

➔ To see how break-even points work, visit the web extra section at lawncandlandscape.com



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• **HOW DO YOU GET PEOPLE EXCITED** about what your landscape company has to offer? As one of the savviest PR minds in history, Phineas Taylor Barnum knew how to drum up business. He understood that the secret to influencing others was believing first and foremost in your product; that people were looking for what you were selling even if they didn't know it yet.

PR and influencer marketing has come a long way since the 1800s. But Barnum's lesson – that people buy on emotion and justify with logic – still drives messaging success. When it comes to your company's fundamental pitch, selling from the heart matters most.

Tell your story in the right way, at the right time, to the right people, using the right channel.

1. INCREASE STORY VALUE WITH AUTHENTICITY.

Customers want value for their money, but they also want a relationship with a business that has character. One of the best ways to connect authentically with customers is to build your CEO's or founder's story into your current communication program. Whether it's rags-to-riches, a lucky detour or a vivid moment when inspiration struck, a compelling origin story can



CHERYL STEELBERG is the marketing and public relations consultant for Bruce Wilson & Co.

make your brand relatable in a way nothing else can.

2. BUILD CONFIDENCE IN YOUR NICHE. Extend your brand with subject matter expertise, a unique passion or a talent. If, for example, your company's founder or co-owner is a triathlete or cyclist, sponsor a community sporting or field turf event. Or, if they're a health nut or foodie, sponsor a farmer's market. Bring your business team and leverage your leader's interest in health and fitness or organically grown edibles to become known as a landscape company that advocates for healthy living.

3. BUILD YOUR FLUENCY.

Use your business literacy to communicate with decision-makers in your market to learn about their goals and what drives what they buy. By speaking the same language as your customer – whether they're a Class A executive or homeowner – you are perceived to be more knowledgeable and more strategically in tune with their goals. As the end-user experience becomes a high service priority for landscape companies, meeting customers where they are and addressing issues from their point of view, rather than the other way around, is not only a competitive advantage but a great way to build and retain trust.

4. SHARE WHAT YOU KNOW.

PR is more than a news release and some good talking points. Communicating with the public and being consistently on message can boost

reputation and sales, and create a bond between your company and your customers. Choose the right platform, identify a unique theme on which to hang your content strategy, and start building relationships with your local industry and multi-channel publications.

5. GET INVOLVED AND GIVE BACK.

The greater good is good for business. Contribute pro bono landscape services to nonprofits, sponsor or mentor young people starting out, support worthwhile causes or adopt a signature project in your community and drive its success. More importantly, create purposeful PR programs that support your value-based culture and demonstrate your commitment to continuous learning: environmental education, employee tuition programs, scholarships for promising kids, industry endowments or milestone gifts for events like a company anniversary.

6. CONSIDER THE PUBLIC FORUM.

In an internet world where being reckless can come back to haunt you, be careful about the words you use and the image you project. Develop a comprehensive social media policy that includes guidelines for online behavior across all platforms, and best practices and training tips for employees to keep your messages consistent with your organizational values, brand standards and strategic messaging goals.

Landscape company owners, like Barnum's ringmaster, juggle a lot of acts. As internal operations become more diverse and communications more technologically complex, knowing which pieces of the marketing puzzle to do in house and what to outsource can save you countless hours and help you build a good brand platform over the long run. **L&L**

Contact Cheryl Steelberg at bwilson@giemedia.com



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KNOW YOUR LEADERS

- **THE ROLE OF ACCOUNT MANAGERS** in the landscaping industry is a critical path function. Account managers are the only ones (other than the owner/president, division manager/branch manager) who touch all of the primary segments of your business, including management and organization, sales, client management, marketing and branding.

There are some hybrids and variations on the theme, but account managers typically follow two models.

1. The production-focused account manager is where most of this begins. This model will typically be responsible for the following tasks or processes:

- Supervising operational crews
- Managing clients' properties
- Selling extras or enhancements
- Renewing contracts

This job is tough to fill as it requires skill sets in two divergent areas – the nuts and bolts of operations and the nuanced skills of client relations and sales. When companies are small and growing, this role is put into play resulting from two imperatives:

- 1) The company cannot afford multiple roles.
- 2) The owner is more directly involved in the day-to-day functions and can better support the people in these roles.

2. The client relations-focused account manager tends to develop as companies grow and the complexities of finding and keeping the production focused type become increasingly more difficult.

This model will typically be responsible for the following tasks or processes:

- Prospecting and selling base



FRED HASKETT

is a green industry veteran with more than 35 years of professional management experience.

contracts

- Developing and maintaining client relationships
- Selling extras or enhancements
- Renewing contracts
- Interfacing with field production managers and their teams

This job type results as companies grow and separate the production-focused role into two separate job functions – the client-focused account manager and the field production manager.

Your first step as an owner is to identify which type of account manager you have or should have in place. Next, identify the action steps for development and training.

The action steps should follow this trajectory:

- Build a plan (short, intermediate and long term)
- Develop detailed job descriptions and identify pivotal duties
- Create a career ladder that lays out a road map for achieving upward mobility
- Develop an employee accountability platform or process
- Develop a guiding strategy
 - To reinforce good organizational behavior

- To avoid reinforcing bad organizational behavior
 - Develop the training protocols for each type of focus
- The training protocols should be grouped into three areas:

1. The areas both types share because this will serve as the training program for the production-focused account manager as well as the field production manager.
2. The areas that are exclusive to the client-focused account manager.
3. The areas that are exclusive to the production focused account manager.

The overarching training protocols can or should look like this. **NOTE:** This is an approximate list. Actual items should be determined by each organization.

• DUTIES AND ACCOUNTABILITIES

- Organizational and operational duties
- Sales and marketing duties
- Financial duties
- HR people duties
- Quality control duties
- Personal effectiveness
- Timelines and imperatives
- Results and outcome expectations

• TRAINING TOPICS

- **Sales and marketing**
 - Estimating and pricing
 - Client needs assessments

- Sales presentations
- Understanding competitive advantage
- Understanding market segments
- Networking and interacting with trade associations
- Specifications

• Client relations

- Retention and renewals
- Quality control
- Relationship management
- Jobsite walkthroughs
- Conflict resolution

• Operations

- Safety
- Productivity
- Routing and scheduling
- Materials management sourcing and staging
- Managing vendor relationships
- Rotation mapping and work flow plans
- Sub-contractors
- Production rates
- Plant, turf and tree health care
- Internal reporting systems

• People

- Interviewing
- Progressive discipline
- Employee reviews
- Termination process
- Employee development
- Coaching/mentoring
- Conflict resolution

• Technical Training Program

- Agronomic basics
- Irrigation basics
- Horticultural basics

• Equipment

- Preventative maintenance
- Crew set-ups
- Managing vendor relationships

By now, it's clear the role of account manager touches all aspects of your organization. For your account managers to become high-performance business people, you must develop and implement a program such as this. **L&L**

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REINVENT & REBRAND

Hillenmeyer, a more than 175-year-old landscaping business, attributes its longevity to reinventing and rebranding.

By Megan Smalley

It's an accomplishment when any type of business hits various milestones – 25 years in business, 50 years in business and so on – particularly in the green industry.

Hillenmeyer, a landscape contractor in central Kentucky, just achieved an almost unbelievable milestone a couple of years ago: the contractor celebrated its 175th anniversary. And, as a family business, it has fifth- and sixth-generation owners running the business today.

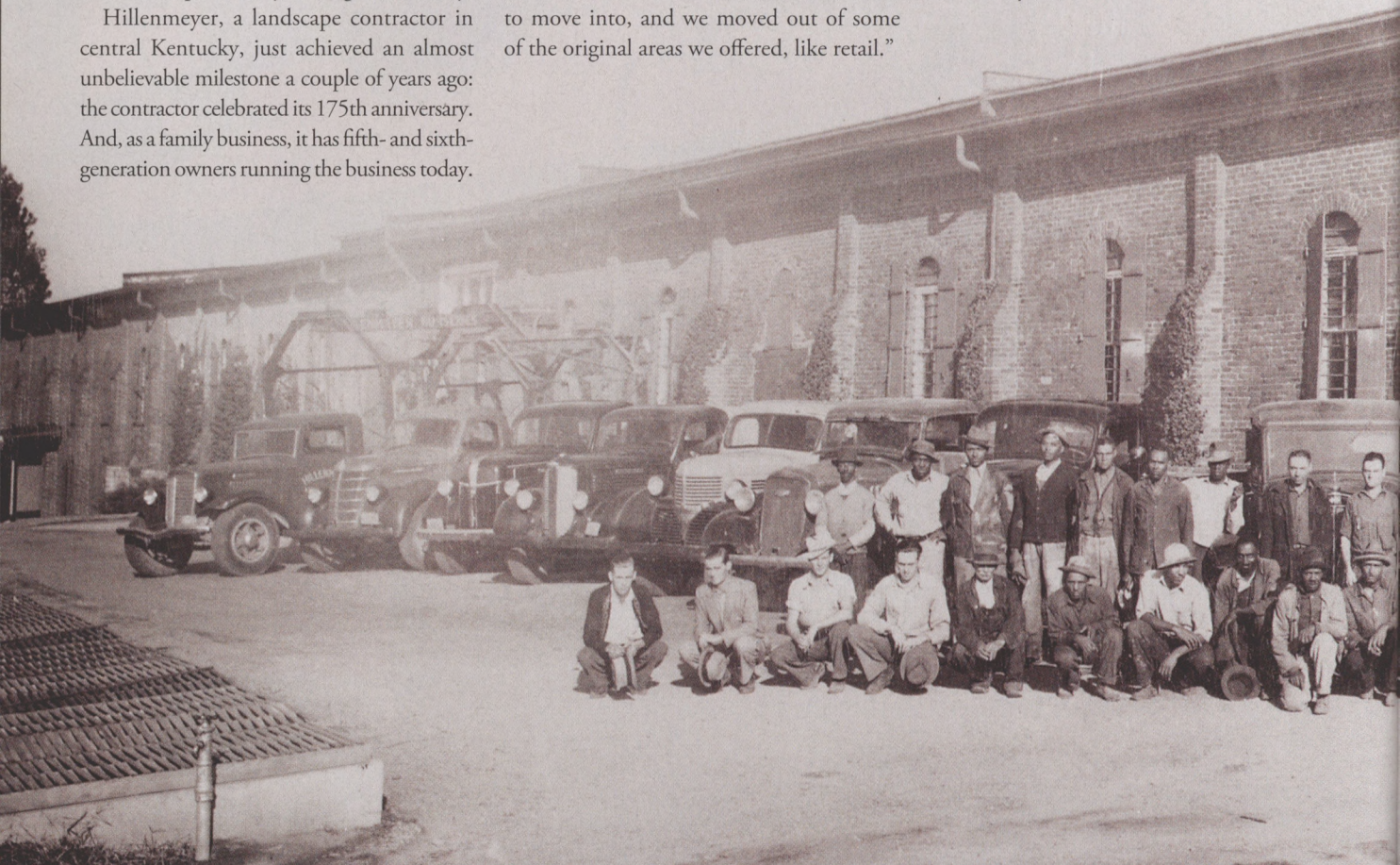
“One of the questions we get asked a lot is, how do we survive?” says Stephen Hillenmeyer, the company's fifth-generation owner and president. “It was through diversification. There were areas that we saw we needed to move into, and we moved out of some of the original areas we offered, like retail.”

He says the company was founded in 1841 by Francis Xavier Hillenmeyer, who immigrated from France as a horticulturalist. What started as a fruit tree nursery gradually diversified into landscaping services, then a retail garden center, a greenhouse operation, and later maintenance services and horse farms. Now they offer lawn care and mosquito services.

The company achieves about \$14 million in annual revenue, providing primarily landscape design and commercial maintenance out of three offices in Kentucky and Tennessee.

Chase Hillenmeyer, one of the sixth-generation owners and vice president in the family business, says the company has stayed afloat so long thanks to its ability to adapt yet stick true to its roots. Both father Stephen and son Chase say the company has never left its main base in the Lexington, Kentucky, area.

“It's been a balance of staying true to who we are as a company and reinventing ourselves,” Chase says. “It's the reason we're still here 177 years later.”





REGULARLY ADDING ON. Assessing the company's service offerings over 175-plus years has attributed to Hillenmeyer's longevity. Stephen says the company often looks for new business segments to launch and focus on.

"That's key to being in business as long as us," he says. "We've reinvented ourselves and we've continued to do so."

For instance, the landscaping company delved into lawn care and pest control services in the past decade. However, instead of adding their own departments for those services, Stephen says the company opted to become a franchisee in both those areas.

For a long time, Hillenmeyer has specialized in landscaping work, and it occasionally performed some lawn care jobs. Stephen says people didn't think of "lawn care" when they thought of Hillenmeyer, though.

"When they thought of Hillenmeyer, they thought of our landscaping or retail store," he says. "They certainly weren't going to think of us for our lawn care."

So, the company decided to become a Weed Man franchisee in 2003. Stephen says it tied Hillenmeyer to a brand that was recognized for lawn care, and the company added new revenues to their business. When first starting, Hillenmeyer had about 200 Weed Man customers. Today, Stephen says it has more than 8,000 Weed Man customers.

Most recently, Hillenmeyer branched off into pest control. Stephen says it seemed like pest control would be a good tie-in business

with its existing customer base. After doing research, Hillenmeyer became a Mosquito Authority franchisee about six years ago, and Stephen says it's grown steadily each year.

Hillenmeyer doesn't have solidified plans to add any other services currently, but Chase says they're always on the lookout for what's next.

"We don't know where that may be, but we're always looking for the next thing while maintaining and growing the businesses we have," he says.

REINVENT WITH A REBRAND. Another key to keeping a business around a long time is keeping the look fresh.

Hillenmeyer is now run by fifth- and sixth-generation owners after starting in 1841.



Company Profile | Hillenmeyer

When the company turned 175, Chase and his brother, Seth Hillenmeyer, also a sixth-generation owner in the business, determined the company needed a rebrand. Stephen agreed with his sons and was on board.

"My brother and I were getting more involved in the business," Chase says. "But at the time, the business was called 'Stephen Hillenmeyer's Landscaping Services.'"

Although Stephen was and still is very involved in the business, Chase says he wanted to consider tweaking the name, so business won't be lost once his father retires.

Also, Chase says he wanted to reconsider the "landscaping services" part of the name.

"We had bought into (two) franchises, and the term 'landscape services' wasn't quite as consistent with those offerings," he says. "So, we wanted something that made sense with our offerings and also give us



When the company announced its rebranding, Hillenmeyer built up the suspense by covering doors and windows leading up to an announcement ceremony.

some flexibility to expand either our franchises or other businesses into the future."

So, in May 2017, the company hired Bullhorn Creative, a branding agency, to help them determine a way to rebrand the business. Stephen says only four employees, including himself and Chase, were involved in the rebranding process, which took about six months.

After a series of 90-minute sessions and researching the company's long history, the

agency came back to Hillenmeyer with a few concepts the business could adopt.

The new look is clean and simple, which as Stephen says, defines the Hillenmeyer brand well.

ROLLING OUT A NEW LOOK. Once all was set, the three owners decided to present the updated brand to its team at the year-end party in December.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF HILLENMEYER

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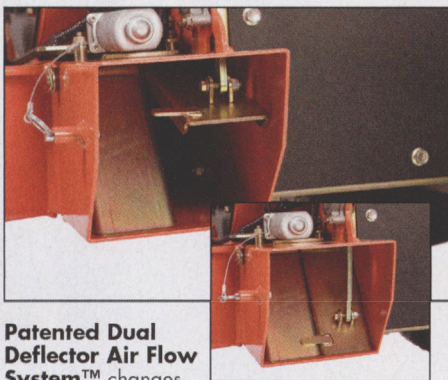


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They painted the new logo on trucks and trailers, and they purchased uniforms and stationery that featured their new logo. To roll it out to employees, they gathered everyone at the party.

"When we rolled it out it was a big shock to everyone," Stephen says. "We did the presentation inside our shop – we had all the doors and windows covered up so they couldn't see out. We introduced what we were doing, why we were doing it. Then, we rolled up the big garage doors and outside they saw our new look. We handed out new shirts and hats to everybody, and everyone was whoopin' and hollerin' – it was really cool."

Looking back at the rebrand process, Chase says he advises companies considering updating their look to call in experts if they don't have someone in-house to help. Also, make

sure everyone who is in a decision-making role needs to be on the same page about goals and expectations for the rebrand.

"That could be a big hurdle," Chase says.

He says timing is also important and recommends companies rebrand around the same time they need to replace trucks or trailers. Even though Hillenmeyer wanted to rebrand the same year as its 175th anniversary, Chase says they decided to wait one year in order to align the rebrand with the purchase of new equipment.

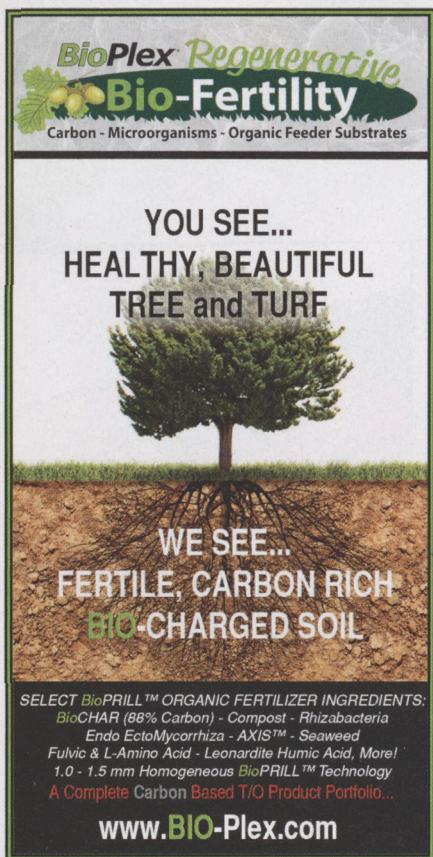
"We really wanted to do this around the 175th anniversary, but we weren't ready to cycle our trucks and trailers," he says. "One of the things Bullhorn said to us that made a lot of sense is the durability of the good drives the decision. You're always replacing paper and cotton – that is T-shirts and business cards –

but metal trailers and signs, that's expensive, so that decides the timing of the decision."

Trucks and trailers also serve as a main avenue of marketing for Hillenmeyer since they act as moving billboards. Chase says giving them a fresh, new look has been beneficial in reaching out to customers and prospective customers.

Although the six-month investment in rebranding the company was time-consuming and costly, Stephen says it has paid off and the new look has helped Hillenmeyer stand out. He notes that even a handful of competitors have complimented him on the company's new look.

"I've had probably six competitors call and say, 'Man, your logo is awesome,'" he says. "That's unusual for people, so it really makes a statement." **L&L**



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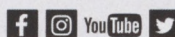


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LAWN & LANDSCAPE

BRANDSPOTLIGHT WITH GREENE COUNTY FERTILIZER COMPANY

BUILDING A BETTER PROGRAM

Moving Fertility Forward

SINCE I BEGAN in the fertilization business over 20 years ago, my curiosity for growing healthy turf has not waned for even one second. I have been constantly looking for ways to improve the current system and cultural practices of turf care with a "Soil First" mentality. While this is not a new thought process, the concepts behind it were greatly outdated. To be clear, I don't take an "organic" approach to lawn care, I believe that it is a noble cause and applaud anyone who chooses that route, but there is a better way. There has been a battle over organic vs traditional in lawn care for many decades. I don't believe that this is a good place to exert energy when the answer is simple, they are both better than the other. Let me explain;

There is a reason that the current mode of fertility is widely accepted, traditional NPK programs provide customers with fairly instantaneous results when compared to their organic counterparts. This is important when running a lawn care company because your customers base 95% of their opinion of your service on the visual aspect. The

flipside is that the organic model provides a considerable amount more to the soil than its traditional counterpart, over time giving it a leg-up as far as sustainability, water and nutrient holding and so-forth. This was always a consideration when I was initially developing the products that we produce and sell today. I needed to get the soil building ability of organics and the visual results of traditional fertilizer in one unit. This ended up truly being the best of both worlds. I was able to produce easy to use liquids that stimulated the microbial populace, foliar fed the plant and left carbon behind in the soil on every application.

Once the mode of application and timing were set, I made it a point to build a program that would continually be enhanced by each and every forth coming application. This is when the mantra of "programs not products" was adopted for my company. While you can take any one of our soil building components, plug it in to your route and enhance your fertility program, the "fertility sandwich" is a much better model to follow. What this means is we are building on to a seasonal program by adding key components at key times to get the best result all season long. This model enabled us to get very specific with programs and dial them into a specific company based on their location, weather, soil types, amount of apps and various other factors so that we can take advantage of whatever mother nature throws at us.

To the point of using pieces of our offerings in your program, the type of fertilizer, method of application, frequency and length of season play a huge part in what we recommend plugging in to your program. Each of our soil building products, N-Ext Air8™, D-Thatch™, RGS™, MicroGreene™ and Humic12™, are meant to add much needed punch to a standard NPK program. Even with these, we consider each and every product you will be putting out alongside it as you go along so that you get optimum results every time.

Understanding carbon-based fertility is also a good thing to cover here. We have been using this term for quite some time and now it has become a buzz word that many companies are using to promote their new products. The form and function behind the term is simple, utilize carbon substances, (ash, humic shale, kelp, bio-char) in a so-



"Planning out what goes down at the right time is a calculated and important decision that is often made way too far in advance."

John Perry,
President/CEO/
Founder of
Greene County
Fertilizer Company

lution or fine granule with nutrients, to be deposited and left behind in the soil to aid in, microbial repopulation and colonization, increased buffering capacity of the soil, better nutrient retention and so forth. The reality is that the addition of carbon substances is greatly enhancing fertility programs nationwide. This is due to the fact that the expense is minimal compared to the gains and the net result is a more robust program with happier customers. One of the biggest benefits is the greater utilization of nitrogen. Carbon and nitrogen relationships in the soil are of vital importance and when introduced together, this dynamic duo works synergistically to deliver nitrogen more effectively and for longer durations.

I have seen many different ways that companies have marketed and applied our products over the years and as time has gone on, the general public has gotten much more educated about carbon-based fertility and are able to understand the benefits with much greater awareness than a decade ago. This is leading to a much easier and more successful transition when beginning to utilize these products in your program. The reality is that anything we produce can be fit into any granular or liquid program. High volume, low volume, we are able to tailor the N-Ext™ products to your unique business model.

When you consider what type of fertility best fits your business model, you will be looking at a multitude of factors; type of customer, availability of products, cost per thousand and so on. There is a science to everything. Planning out what goes down at the right time is a calculated and important decision that is often made way too far in advance (before all variables are considered). This is why we take a more expanded view when making our recommendations for your specific needs. There are some key components that we apply at the same time of year regardless of geographic locale or apps per season. N-Ext RGS™ is one of these. I recommend going out 2x annually in the spring and fall to both start off and put lawns to bed in a stronger way. The beauty of this product is it fits into any program and budget. At .21 cents per thousand RGS™ benefits far outweigh the costs and this can be applied with herbicides, pre-emergents, insecticides and fungicides without any special mixing.

This holds true with many of the other N-Ext™ products and again we look at building a better program for you so that your mind can focus on growing the business while we focus on growing better turf.

John Perry is President/CEO Founder of Greene County Fertilizer Company and its parent company, Bio Green USA and author of Lawncology®.



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It's all smiles at Green
Lawn Fertilizing, where
employees are incentivized
in a number of ways.

Healthy COMPETITION

CONTESTS CREATE FRIENDLY RIVALRIES

among coworkers and keep the drive alive
at Green Lawn Fertilizing.

Story by **Brian Horn**

A TRIP TO DISNEY WORLD

isn't just reserved for the Super Bowl's Most Valuable Player. At Green Lawn Fertilizing in West Chester, Pennsylvania, it's a way to get better ideas to improve the company.

It's called the Disney Challenge and, last year, it called on all non-management employees to come up with an idea to improve the business based on the book "Be Our Guest: Perfecting the Art of Customer Service" by Ted Kinni.

Michael Bradley, an inside sales representative, won in 2018, the first year the company ran the contest. Bradley's idea to improve the company's onboarding was the best of nearly 100 ideas submitted to the contest. In addition to Bradley's \$5,000

Disney vacation, his direct supervisor, Wes McCorkle, also won \$1,000.

The contest was so successful at keeping team members engaged in working to improve the business, it was brought back in 2019 with another \$5,000 vacation on the line and another book, "The Service Culture Handbook" by Jeff Toister, as the basis for inspiration.

At Green Lawn Fertilizing, contests like the Disney Challenge are just one example of the incentives that they have put in place.

CELEBRATING GOOD SERVICE. Three years ago, the company started an awards program to celebrate its best employees and express gratitude to top workers.

The awards aren't a total surprise since only the winners are invited to the awards dinner, but no one knows what they'll be winning until the ceremony. Awards can be anything from top lawn production to top door-to-door salesman to lawn rookie of the year, with 25 in total.

Each winner receives a plaque and a



Employees at Green Lawn are encouraged to take some paid time away from the office to volunteer for charity events like Habitat for Humanity.

➔ % OF COMPANIES THAT HAVE A BONUS PROGRAM IN PLACE FOR THESE POSITIONS.

68% Foreman

62% Acct. Manager

62% Executive

61% Laborer

42% Back office

gift card, but the President's Award winner, chosen by company President Matt Jesson, gets an engraved clock.

To keep things fair, everyone is made aware of the criteria and the numbers are made public. And while the competition has the potential to breed some unfriendly rivalries, Green Lawn hasn't run into that problem.

"What we've seen is usually everyone gets standing ovations and everyone is excited for them," says Alex Wolfington, vice president of sales. "Numbers don't lie, so a lot of the awards are based off of just the numbers so that's never been an argument. As for the Manager of the Year and all of those awards that are selected, it usually is going to the person that deserves it."

Ben Schloss, director of marketing, says that's something that causes a little bit of concern, but the positives far outweigh any negative feelings about being overlooked. "We feel it creates drive, too," he says.

Wolfington adds, "Everyone understands why the winners win. There's no shock so far."

The awards started off small with a catered lunch at the branch, but evolved into a dinner at a local restaurant the second year. Then there's a second dinner, to which all award winners, the management and their spouses are invited. The management team hires magicians, comedians or live bands to perform as well.

"It's just starting small and then growing it every year and then just when it comes to the awards – just setting the parameters and celebrating who the winner is," Wolfington says.

He also recommends setting up a panel to choose award-winners, putting the criteria out for everyone to see and having a scoreboard so that people can see how they're doing.

MORE WAYS TO WIN. Twice a year (once in the spring, once in the fall) the company runs a sales blitz where the entire company breaks down into six teams (usually 20 to 25 people a team) and everyone is encouraged to sell.

"Everyone still continues to do their job," Wolfington says. "I know some other companies send everybody out and sell over the

LAWN & LANDSCAPE received almost 300 responses for an incentives survey, which was sent in January to its readers. For more survey results, visit the web extras section on lawnandlandscape.com.

weekend, but we keep it business as usual just with that extra motivation for everyone to participate in the sales process. Everyone is getting a lot more competitive."

Each day, management sends around a spreadsheet with updated team sales totals so everyone can see how their team is doing. With a PTO day on the line for every member of the winning team, things get competitive around the office during those two weeks, but it also keeps things light.

"It definitely creates a good, competitive environment," Schloss says. "I've heard around the office where people are talking to their team members like 'Hey, where's your sale for the week' and there's a little bit of competitive banter as well."

Throughout the year, the company also pits employees against each other for Super Bowl squares, raffles, March Madness and more.

The winners of March Madness and the Super Bowl squares each get a paid day off. "Everyone is allowed to play whether you watch or not," Wolfington says. "People watch the Super Bowl because of it and everyone talks about it and everyone gets all excited about it."

During the holiday party in the middle of December, everyone gets a raffle ticket for a chance to win prizes like TVs, drones, cameras and video game systems. The company spends more than \$3,000 total, but by shopping on Black Friday, they're able to get some great deals.

There are lots of other job perks like free lunches for the office if they are able to hit a weekly goal of preventing customers from cancelling accounts, or events like branch barbecues, plus an annual golf outing.

The company also is involved with several charities like Habitat for Humanity. Employees are encouraged to take some paid time away from the office to volunteer for these events, instead of doing it on their own time.

"We do a lot of small, periodic things like that for individual teams to kind of just get everyone in line with the goals in the departments or things like that, too," Schloss says.



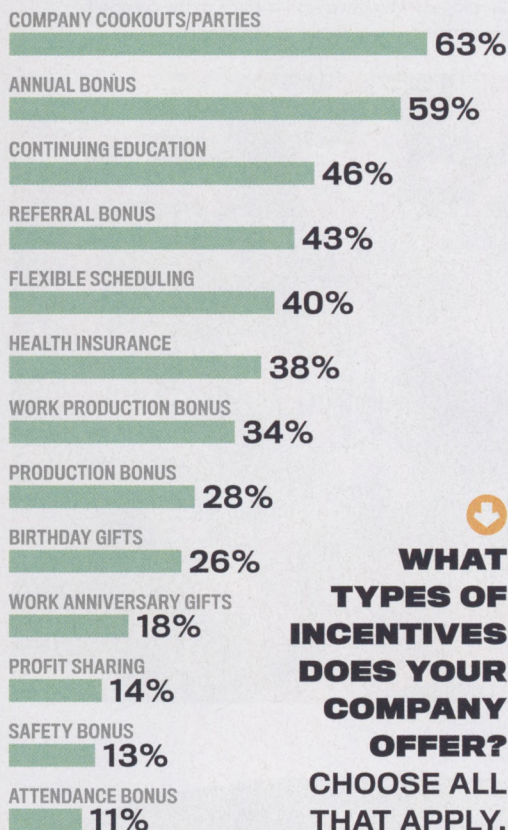
ABOVE: Pictured with his management team, President Matt Jesson, fourth from the right, chooses the President's Award winner every year to recognize an exemplary employee. **BELOW:** Green Lawn Fertilizing hosts a yearly dinner to recognize employees who have won awards at the company. The awards range from top door-to-door salesperson to lawn rookie of the year.





NUMBERS DON'T LIE:

Alex Wolfington (left), with Ben Schloss, says a lot of the awards are based off numbers so there are no arguments about who wins.



**WHAT
TYPES OF
INCENTIVES
DOES YOUR
COMPANY
OFFER?
CHOOSE ALL
THAT APPLY.**

BUDGETING FOR BONUSES. Every department leader is given a discretionary budget for the year to spend however they see fit, whether it's a pizza party, a bowling outing or something else they'd like to do.

"Our employees definitely work pretty hard, so this is a way for the department leaders to say, 'Hey, let's take the team out and say thank you,'" Schloss says.

All of the incentive programs add up to about \$100,000, but with an annual revenue of \$15.7 million, it's less than half a percent of income.

In fact, Schloss put together a company yearbook highlighting the awards dinner, charity initiatives and more. Green Lawn distributed the yearbook to every employee and even those who come in for an interview to showcase the company culture.

IMPLEMENTING INCENTIVES. Schloss says when it comes to starting an incentive program, companies should start small and do what they can. It

could even be something small like buying lunch for the office, hosting a barbecue or putting out Gatorade for teams after a hot day.

"It's really important to incentivize your employees in any way you can, even if it's just a single employee of the year or anything," Schloss says. "Just having something in place where people can have something to strive for I think is good."

Green Lawn might have a robust incentive program now, but the key is to start with something manageable. They award 25 employees now but started with just seven or eight three years ago.

"There's different ways that you can do it without spending thousands of dollars, but once you start it, you've got to be consistent," Wolfington says. "It can't be a one-and-done thing because that doesn't mean anything, and then when you start it again, they're going to think it's just going to end again."

Kate Spigen contributed to this article.

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FUN & GAMES

Lawn Doctor of West Lake County • Griffith, Indiana • 14 Employees

Lawn Doctor of West Lake County

is in the same boat as a lot of landscape companies right now: They could grow the business if they had more reliable workers.

The lawn fertilizing and weed control business grosses over \$1 million and allocates up to 1 percent of their revenue for fun activities for the staff. "Part of running a business is not only attracting good talent, but keeping the ones you have happy. So we pay competitively, but we do a lot of group things," says Nick Shaw, owner.

For example, last fall, the whole team went out for a team combat laser tag competition. "The first thing we realized is that we're too old and we should not have scheduled three hours for that," Shaw jokes.

They've also done whirly ball (a cross between bumper cars, lacrosse and basketball), skating parties and ski outings.

Some of the outings, like the ski trip, are last-minute adventures, but others take a little more planning.

Shaw's wife used to handle the event planning, but now he and his office manager, and occasionally the production manager, are in charge of organizing. He says the most important thing is to choose something that won't require a lot of work on their end.

"So small business owners – we wear a million different hats – and a lot of times we can only focus on the few things that we have to focus on and that's what's right in our face," Shaw says. "We basically want to hand you money and get the expected result out."

But the outings all depend on how the company is doing that year. If it's doing well, Shaw will put together a few more things

than if it's not as successful. And if the company is really suffering, they might just end up at Pizza Hut a few times during the year.

Back in 2011, the company went all out and told the staff that if they could hit their retention and production goals before Thanksgiving, they would all head down to Orlando for the Lawn Doctor conference.

"I talked about it once a week in our weekly meeting," Shaw says. "They talked about it every day, sometimes every hour. They're like, 'Look, I've got to get these customers done so that we can go to Florida.'"

People were coming in on Saturdays and going way above and beyond what they usually did. And nearly eight years later, they're still talking about it.

"It's just like when you get a good customer. It's so much easier to keep harvesting a good customer than it is to grow a new one," Shaw says. "It is so much easier to harvest and develop your staff if you keep them and train them and do well by them than it is to hire and train new ones." – **Kate Spirgen**

PLAYS, BALLETS & GIVEAWAYS

Blades of Green • Harwood, Maryland • 85 Employees

Giving out anything from baseball tickets to flat-screen televisions, establishing a high-quality company culture has always been pertinent at Blades of Green says Daniele Collinson, pest division manager.

When times get particularly tough on her staff, Collinson says her company incentivizes employees by creating contests or raffle drawings for prizes. She adds that with the labor market already thin, making employees feel like they're valued is a must. Gamifying the program becomes essential, Collinson says, ensuring people have a reward at the end of the day for their quality work.

Take last summer for example: When the weather cleared up after extended periods of rain, crews were exhausted since they had to catch up on all their missed work. Blades of Green decided to reward one lucky employee with a flat-screen television. Crew members who reached a 90-percent completion rate or higher submitted their names into a drawing. This contest wasn't initially planned, but Collinson and the rest of management felt the employees deserved something to boost their spirits.

"These guys are really working extremely hard to get caught up on production. They're putting in long days," Collinson says. "We're huge on culture at our company, and I think that the incentives pro-

grams are a part of the culture that we've established. That's part of what makes a culture fun and makes people want to come to work."

Collinson estimates the company does at least eight contests a year, though they're never sure when the giveaways will be. In terms of budgeting, the company sets aside a pool of money for the programs but doesn't specify when or on precisely what competitions the money will be spent.

After surveying the employees on how they liked contests when the program first started, Blades of Green started tweaking their giveaways. In one instance, the company gave away tickets to a popular upcoming sporting event, but now employees who win the drawing can select what they want to attend. Collinson says one crew member went to the ballet, while another decided to go catch a play.

Some still go out and attend football or baseball games, but Collinson says that as long as employees keep price within reason – she says a good rule of thumb is under \$200 a ticket – the company will provide it. The biggest thing is just making sure the employee feels the reward is worth the work.

"The whole point of an incentive program is it's something the team wants and looks forward to," Collinson says. – *Jimmy Miller*

“WE’RE HUGE ON CULTURE AT OUR COMPANY, AND I THINK THAT THE INCENTIVES PROGRAMS ARE A PART OF THE CULTURE THAT WE’VE ESTABLISHED.”

Daniele Collinson, Blades of Green, pest division manager

BILLY BUCKS

Akehurst Landscape Services
Joppa, Maryland
130 Employees

At Akehurst Landscape Services, employees are no strangers to recognition. Bill Akehurst, founder of the company, says he budgets about \$50,000 a year for incentives.

The "Billy Bucks" program (named after Billy, naturally) is a way to give employees a boost, but also helps the company when labor is sparse.

If a worker recruits a day laborer to help out with a heavy work load, the employee gets \$10 in Billy Bucks for each day the day laborer stays on the job. The Billy Bucks then translate into actual money on pay day.

When it comes to budgeting for the incentives, Akerhurst says it all depends on the type of incentive. With Billy Bucks, the incentive pays for itself in a way, he says. More workers means more profit, so the company doesn't budget for those incentives.

A tool incentive is offered to crews as well, which is easy to budget for. Crews start with \$1,500 and as their tools need to be repaired or replaced, it comes out of that budget. At the end of the season, whatever money is left gets distributed amongst the crew.

"If they don't use the money at the end of their year when everything's inventoried, if everything's good and nothing needs to be replaced, it can go in their pocket or they can save it to the next year to buy new equipment," he says. – *Lauren Rathmell*

SHOVELIN' IN THE CASH

May's Lawn Care • Glen Raven, North Carolina • 30 Employees

Living in North Carolina means snowfall is rare, but when it happens, Corey May says it pays to be prepared.

In the offseason, May used to contract out snow and ice management instead of asking back his full-time employees. Their hourly wage is usually somewhere between \$13 and \$22, but May couldn't get people to come back enough to help with plowing snow, so he would pay others \$25 to \$35 an hour just to make the job attractive to them.

But May decided that wasn't fair to his employees. So, to incentivize their attendance in the offseason and to compensate them appropriately for the extra work they put in, May started paying his employees a snow bonus. Almost instantly, May says his employees started coming in voluntarily to help with clearing snow.

"Nobody likes to go work a 14-hour shift

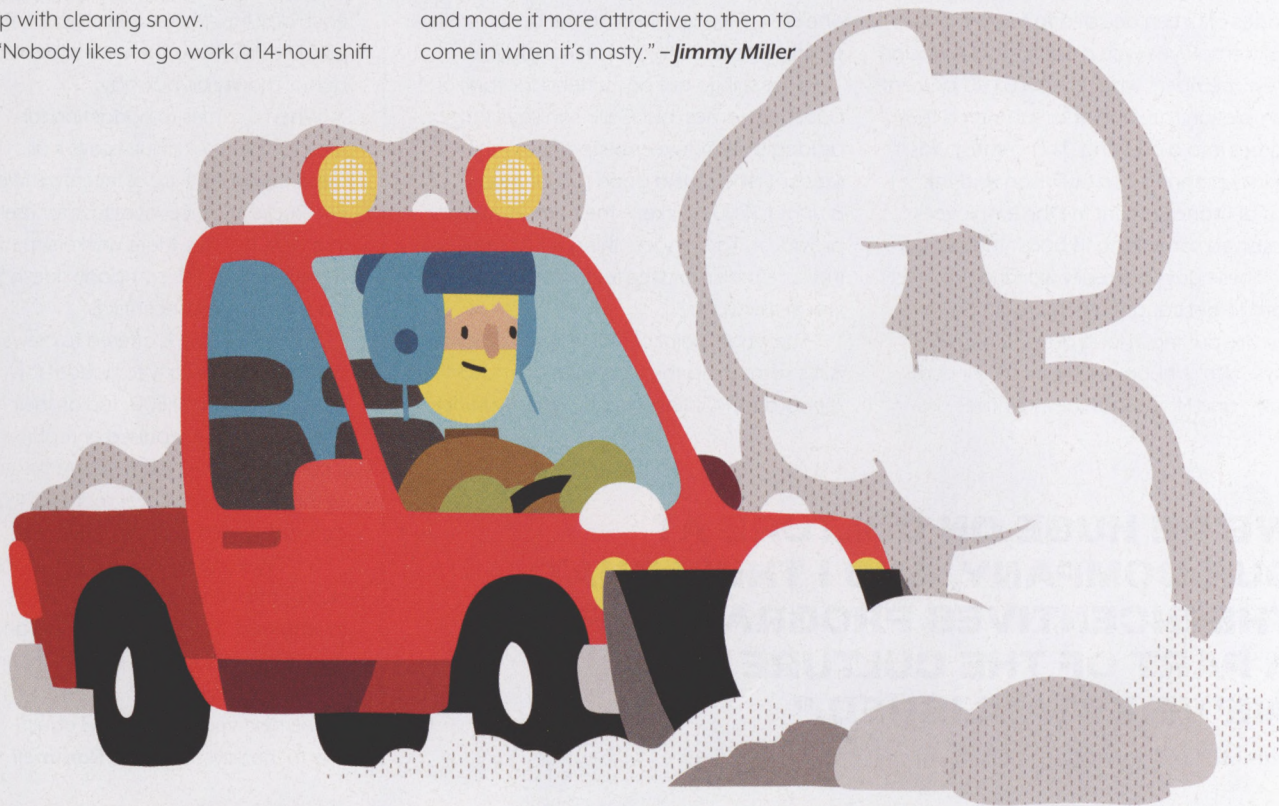
pushing snow or shoveling snow," May says. "I get a whole lot less people miss snow (work) now that I do that."

May devised the snow bonus system on his own because he recognized firsthand how hard the work can be. During the winter, he'll evaluate how profitable his team was and split the earnings accordingly. Sometimes the money turns out to be worth double- or triple-time wages, but it ultimately depends on how many clients they serviced and whether or not an employee missed a shift. If somebody didn't show up for a snow shift, it might affect how much goes into their bonus.

"I knew how hard of work the snow is, and I'm able to charge more for it than a regular landscape service," May says. "I felt like it was fair that they made a little more and made it more attractive to them to come in when it's nasty." —*Jimmy Miller*

I FELT LIKE IT WAS FAIR THAT THEY MADE A LITTLE MORE AND MADE IT MORE ATTRACTIVE TO THEM TO COME IN WHEN IT'S NASTY."

Corey May, founder, May's Lawn Care



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PUNCTUAL PAYMENT

Orlando's Landscaping • Newport News, Virginia
25 Employees During Peak Season



When the minutes employees were arriving late to work started to add up, Erin Snyder Dixon needed something to motivate employees to show up on time.

At the same time, she was getting calls that workers couldn't find the right clothing or would arrive dressed incorrectly.

"We tried to figure out something we could do that would not only get them in the door, giving them incentive to get in the door, but that could also take care of another problem," says Snyder Dixon, general manager at Orlando's Landscaping in Newport, Virginia.

So, the company implemented a bonus for just arriving to work on time. Each month employees arrive to work on time every day, they are awarded \$50. If someone is one minute late, they are

disqualified for the month, unless it was an excused absence.

"At the end of the month, they know they've been awarded \$50 – it's in their little kitty," she says, adding they can use it immediately or save it up.

That money can then be used to buy anything employees could wear to work: gloves, boots, underwear, etc.

The company provides all the necessities to work on a job, but this allowance can be used for something a little nicer like an expensive jacket they couldn't ordinarily afford.

"They don't have to wear it to work," she says. "It just has to be something that they could wear to work if they wanted to.

"What that prevents is things like them

going out and buying an objectionable shirt, or for us to be footing the bill for something that would be inappropriate on the job."

The money is paid out in two ways – the employee is reimbursed when they turn in a receipt, or the employee can get a cash advance.

"They don't get it switched over to their bonus money until they bring me their receipt," she says. "But that way they have the money in hand to go buy the stuff."

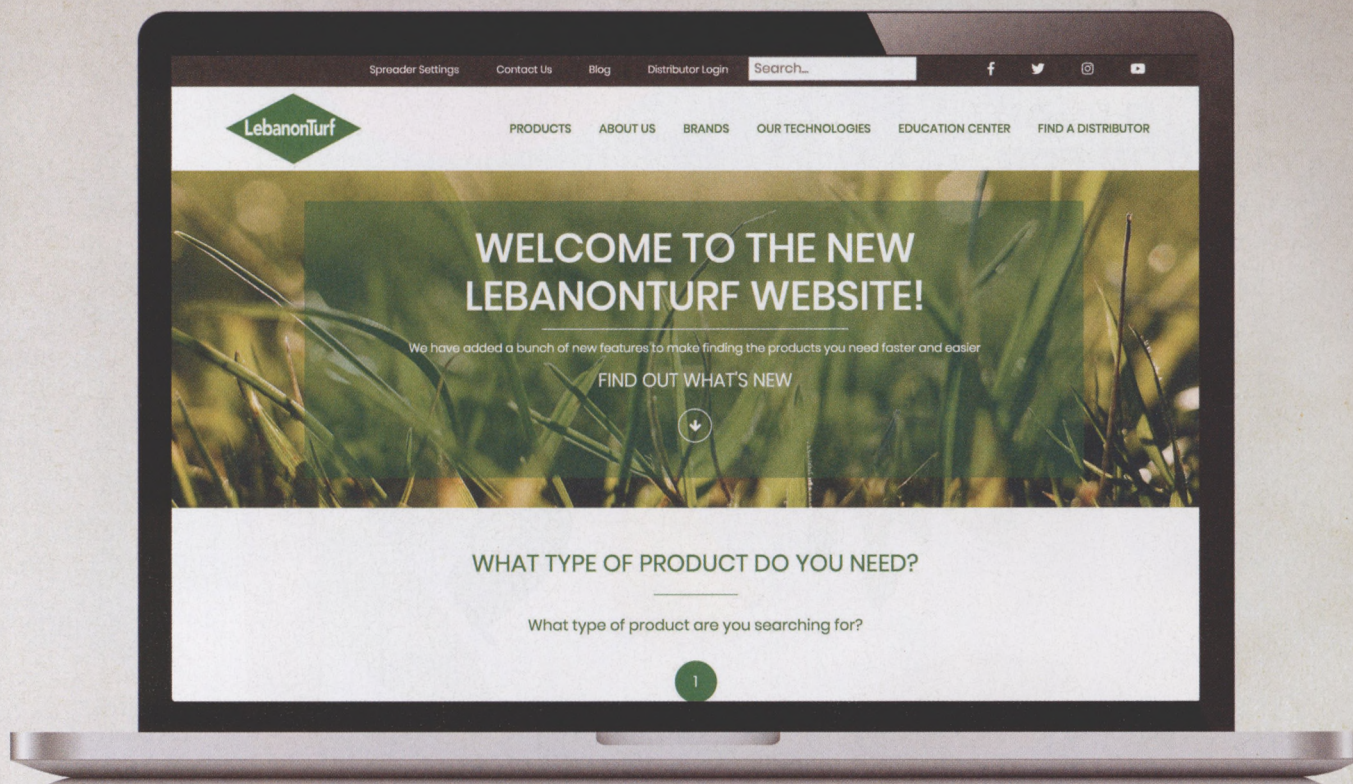
Snyder Dixon says she had some concerns that if a worker missed one day, then that worker would stop trying for the rest of the month, but that hasn't happened.

She had to show one employee that he was late 21 times in a span of 44 days. As soon as she did that, he started to arrive promptly more often.

"What has happened since then is he's late three or four times," she says.

"We're still working on it, but his record has really improved because even though we haven't hit that mark yet to get that bonus, he's still working on it and he's starting to establish better habits. It's been one of our better programs." – **Brian Horn**

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“WE’RE A DECENT-SIZED COMPANY, SO WHAT IF THE COST IS \$150 OR EVEN \$200 A WEEK TO LOAD UP ON FOOD FOR EVERYBODY?”

Paul Wagner, president, FitTurf



SUPER SNACKS

FitTurf • Denver, Colorado • 54 Employees During Peak Season

It's a simple concept, but FitTurf President Paul Wagner says offering snacks and drinks to his employees makes a big impact on daily operations and crew attitudes. While they try to keep the snacks relatively healthy, there are other options like chips available, too.

“Because of what our field guys do, it's just having Gatorade or water in one of those 5-gallon water jugs so they can load up in the morning,” he says. “And when they come back at 3 or 4, they're starving so they're able to grab a granola bar, chips or whatever while they are wrapping up their day. There's no one

that doesn't take advantage of it.”

Wagner says before he started providing the refreshments, he had heard of other companies offering coffee for 25 cents or so. He did the math and realized it's well worth it to just provide those things free of charge to his workers.

“We're a decent-sized company, so what if the cost is \$150 or even \$200 a week to load up on food for everybody?” he says. “Divide that out by however many people we have working there ... I think it's great.”

Wagner says the cost of offering the snacks and drinks doesn't have an impact on FitTurf's bottom line, so it wasn't

something they planned ahead for in terms of budgeting.

In addition to the food perks, FitTurf also offers an attendance bonus to its employees. For perfect monthly attendance, workers get \$150 at the end of the month. It goes right into their paycheck. Stephanie Wagner, CFO, says it's the nature of the business to have hard workers who get worn out quickly.

“The attendance bonus helps them to develop a feeling of support,” she says. It especially helps at the end of the month when workers tend to call off for their last day or two of the month. —**Lauren Rathmell**



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GARY HARDY & JOSH BRUNNER
CEO/COO, BRUNNER'S LAWN & SERVICES

Losses and ladders

Gary Hardy and Josh Brunner are finding it's hard to raise prices and still hit revenue goals. **By Brian Horn**

Despite some challenges, Gary Hardy, left, and Josh Brunner, left, are still excited about the possibilities of raising their prices and making better profits on jobs, but so far, they have been striking out at their Dayton, Ohio-based company.

"I've lost \$100,000 worth of clients," Hardy says. "They were low profit. The thing is that we're doing things the right way that they (the Harvesters) want us to do it, but I don't have the resources to do it as quickly as they want stuff done," Hardy says. "So, we've lost some of those low margin clients."

While that may be a bad thing in the short term, it may pay off in the long term.

"What's going to end up happening is our revenue is going to decrease, but our profit margin is going to increase and we're going to focus on our team and get our foundation and then really start trying to expand," Hardy says.

MOVING UP. While they haven't had much luck with proposals, they have noticed that the culture's improved and employees seem more motivated. Hardy says this can be attributed to changes like developing a safety program, investing in new uniforms and providing \$100 allowance to buy any replacements that are needed.

But more importantly, they've also established a career ladder to give employees an idea of what a future at Brunner's looks like, and a training curriculum based off of the Harvester's templates to achieve these positions.

Get to work

With an offseason of planning under their belts, the Turnaround Tour companies are ready to start the season.

The heavy lifting is now underway as the teams at Brunner's Lawn & Services, Pratt's Lawn Care and Landscapes and Maple Hill Lawn & Garden are executing the plans they worked on during the winter. Brunner's hit a snag when it comes to raising prices, while Pratt's has been busy catching up from a snowy winter and Maple Hill is fixing a major problem discovered recently.

FOR MORE ON THE TURNAROUND TOUR with the Harvest Group's Bill Arman and Ed LaFlamme, visit bit.ly/lawntour or see our February issue.

It starts with the title of groundskeeper one, which is an entry level position for someone who's never touched a piece of equipment. Hardy says it should only take two weeks to complete that training.

"Anybody that has any skills of any sort as a laborer can typically figure that stuff out pretty quick," Hardy says, adding that the employee will also need to complete the safety program they purchased from the National Association of Landscape Professionals. Then the employee can move to groundskeeper two, which should be completed within 60 days at the latest. Then they can move to groundskeeper three.

"By the time they certify in groundskeeper three, they'll be able to do everything in the company as a laborer – mulching, mowing grass trimming, things like that," Hardy says.

Once groundskeeper three is achieved, they are seen as a leader in training. "After they're certified at that, then it's team leader one and then team leader two," Hardy says.

So, I created this whole career tier and I've got training programs written out up to the team leader one position."

Hardy realizes the starting pay is low, but that's because he and Brunner want second chance employees and kids in high school or those who are just out of high school.

"Somebody like an 18-year-old-kid out of high school can start here at \$11 an hour and within 60 days be at 12 to \$13 an hour," Hardy says.

HARVESTERS' TAKE. Despite the busy winter doing snow work, Gary and Josh have been "working more on their business and not as much in it" this winter. After we helped prioritize the urgent and important items from their playbook, they have been working feverishly to accomplish as much as possible before spring. Here's a list of some of what has been done.

The online training program for their crews is set up and ready to go. All work

schedules are in place for spring. Career Ladders were created so their team members can see how to advance in the company.

New safety cones for their trucks were purchased as we suggested, and their name will be applied to help in their branding/marketing efforts.

They are changing their team members uniforms so they are more appealing. Most importantly, they have separated their profit centers (departments) so they will be able to get gross margins for each and every month.

Not only are they doing terrific in accomplishing these needed items, but they met their annual snow budget one month early and their year-to-date profits are double that of last year.

Gary will focus on growing sales and hiring needed crew members while Josh attends to the equipment and vehicle preparation for the fast approaching spring season.

All in all, they are positioned well to have a terrific 2019. ☺

JENNIFER DAVIES & BOB NAYLOR

OWNERS, PRATT'S LAWN CARE AND LANDSCAPES

Settling in

Jennifer Davies and Bob Naylor are plugging away at the goals the Harvesters set for them, but will it last when the snow clears?

By Lauren Rathmell

Since the Harvester's visit to Bala, Ontario, the team at Pratt's Lawn Care and Landscapes has been busy digging their small Canadian town out of 6 feet of snow. But the weather hasn't stopped Bob Naylor and Jennifer Davies from getting started on their Turnaround

Tour "to-do" list.

One of the biggest reliefs for the couple comes in the form of a part-time administrative assistant. The new assistant is helping Jennifer with invoicing and payroll two to three days a week, which will hopefully alleviate the issues they were facing with late invoices.

"It's been giving me more time to focus on other things and have some personal time," Davies says.

Naylor and Davies are starting to settle into their more defined roles in the business, too. Naylor has been managing then on the operations side of things, which has been seamless with all the snowfall. The true test will come in the spring when the busy season starts. Davies says she anticipates that staying tied to their specific duties might be a struggle when the snow melts.

"I've been able to tell our employees if they have an issue that Naylor is supposed to handle," she says. "I'm starting to let them know when they need to talk to Naylor about things."

ALL ON BOARD. Once Bill Arman and Ed LaFlamme left, Naylor and Davies had a team meeting to go over everything they discussed with the Harvesters. They even addressed the goal to hit the \$2-million mark in 2021. When they went over what the company needed to work on, the team's response was simple: "We can do that."

"The team is really on board with the new changes," she says. "We have the management people; we just need more (field) employees."

Right now, Pratt's employs 16 people, but Davies says the ideal number of employees is 25.

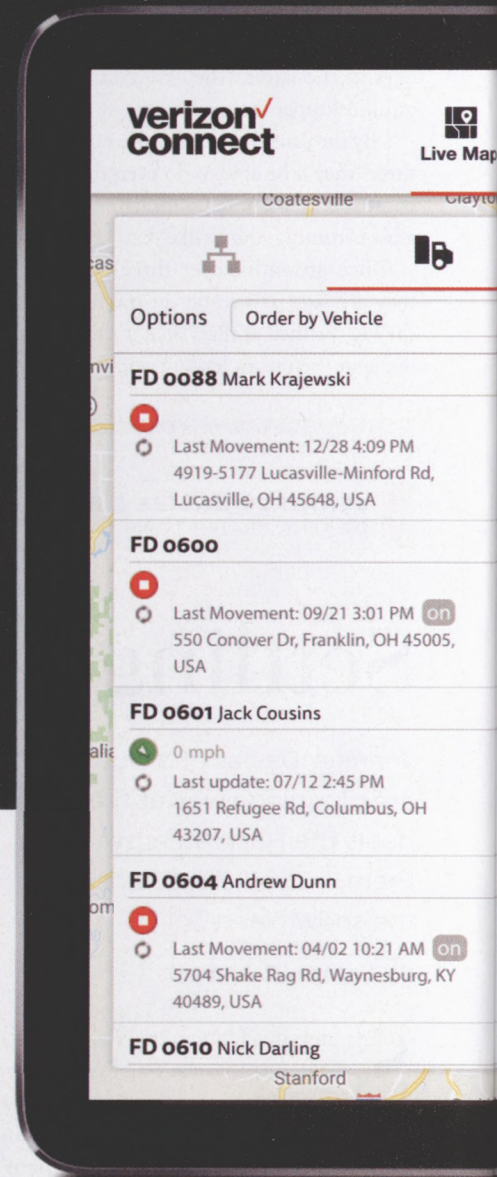
Recruiting season is gearing up for Davies, and she's planning on heading to career fairs at local colleges armed with recruiting tips

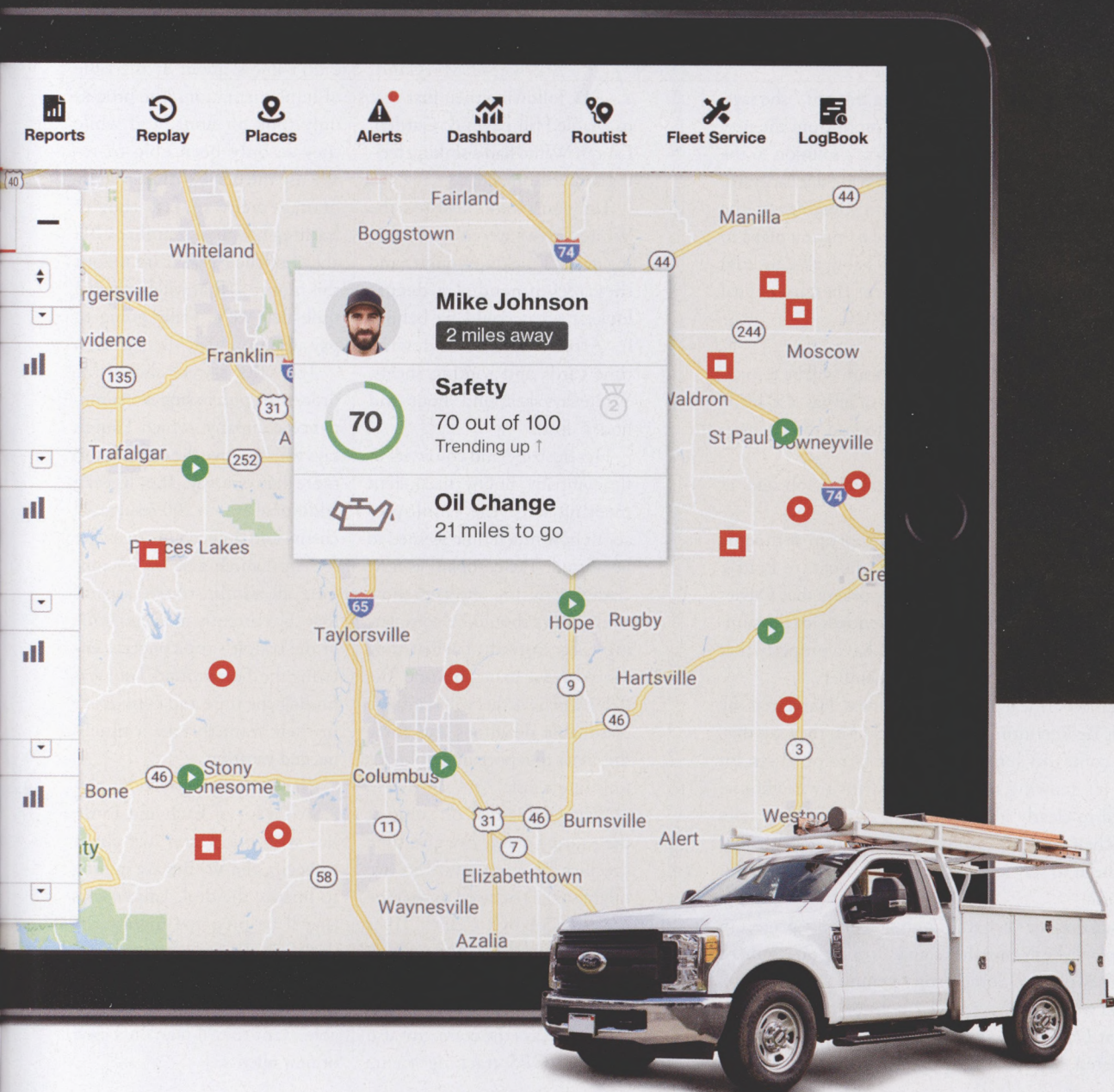
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from Arman and LaFlamme. In the meantime, she was able to hire two additional employees with experience in gardening and landscape construction, one of which came from a local job fair.

The couple even found a short-term solution for their employee housing issue. A client let them know he wouldn't be visiting this summer, leaving his summer house empty for the season. Davies was able to rent the five-bedroom property out for the summer and she plans on using it to house five apprentices this summer.

EXPANSION PLANS. Davies' greenhouse plans are still well underway, and she plans on starting construction on the site, which sits on their property, on June 15.

"We've spent four to five years planning this out," she says. She feels confident that they'll be able to profit from the new revenue segment. The greenhouse also offers a solution to the space issue that comes with running a business in their backyard.

"It was easy in the past to have team meetings at the kitchen table," Davies says. Now that the company plans to add employees, she's looking forward to being able to hold meetings inside the greenhouse office space. The current goal is to have the grand opening in May of 2020.

HARVESTERS' TAKE. Most of core team will be returning from last year. This is great news. Jennifer has also hired a part time assistant to help free her up to lead the business and to work on the business.

Jennifer will be attending several recruiting job fairs at the local colleges.

The Harvesters will be helping Jennifer "tool up" with some great recruiting tips that will help attract students to Pratt's.

Housing is such an issue for seasonal workers that Davies has already arranged housing for five apprentices for the summer. This was arranged with a client who has a property that will accommodate these seasonal team members.

This is the most critical part of the business. Harvesters say ABR: Always Be Recruiting! By the looks of it, they get this.

When it comes to Jennifer and Bob's roles, it's a lot easier when it's snowing since this is Naylor's wheelhouse. We will need to clearly identify Naylor's and Davies' roles in writing. Their relationship has been pretty good so far. Naylor will need to stay in his lane during the summer, but can he do this?

They are starting the very ambitious greenhouse project in May. The goal will be to have the Grand Opening on Mother's Day 2020. They plan on doing a soft opening a week before.

We believe when you have a plan, a vision and the determination that Davies has, this project has a good chance of being completed. Will it make money? ☺

BOBBY & LAUREN WHITE

OWNERS, MAPLE HILL LAWN & GARDEN

Wasting no time

The Whites are trying to quickly purchase another company while pressing crews on timeliness.

By Jimmy Miller

After the Harvesters left Accokeek, Maryland, following their first visit to Maple Hill Lawn & Garden, Lauren White had a sinking feeling in her stomach.

The consultants insisted the Whites' crews weren't completing tasks quickly enough, and they recommended a deeper look at what could be behind it. After carefully reviewing time cards and routing sheets, White says she found "hours and hours" lost.

Her husband and co-owner of the company, Bobby, had a stern meeting with the employees about how much time seemed to be wasted. The company is now changing its time sheets to show when crews should be completing tasks instead of when they should arrive to begin work. The Whites believe this will reinforce reasonable deadlines and force the crews to report any problems finishing a task.

"The goal is that on some of the routing sheets, we give time specifics," Lauren says. "So (we might say), 'You need to be done with that job by 1 o'clock.' That won't allow them the time to freely just take their time and do whatever they want."

Lauren says the company also installed GPS tracking on its

vehicles, which the employees didn't know about at the time of implementation. The process only took an hour, and while they've only been able to really use the devices during snow management so far, they're learning how best to utilize GPS ahead of their lawn care rollout this month. "That will be the big time that we're really going to pay attention to it," Lauren says.

The Whites were also in the process of purchasing a maintenance company, which Lauren says will improve the company in more than one way. They'll get an additional 100 to 200 residential clients and an account manager to help Lauren ease up on running all administrative aspects that she currently manages. One of the couple's top concerns entering the Turnaround Tour was finding the time and confidence in their team to take a much-needed vacation.

The contract negotiations presented a lot of back and forth, but with the season just about to begin, the Whites are itching to finalize the deal. Lauren says they'll be prepared in case the deal falls through, but she also says she's been ramping up her organization efforts in the probable event they'll take on a slew of new clients.

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
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Bobby and Lauren White are in the process of acquiring another company, which could help them take the vacation they've desperately wanted.

"It's a lot of back and forth in regard to salary, what do you have for clients and equipment, and what do you make per month?" Lauren says. "We're trying to get all those details before we present an offer."

HARVESTERS' TAKE. Bobby and Lauren had four critical items to do in their Playbook: increase gross margins, grow sales, hire an account manager and put a safety program in place. They are making great headway on all fronts.

First and most importantly, they are in the process of negotiating the purchase of a small landscape maintenance business from a friend. At this writing, it looks like a sure thing. This acquisition will

substantially increase the company's sales and give them the needed account manager they desire.

As for increasing gross margins, they have reviewed all of their jobs and discovered their crews were goofing off at the end of the day. These un-billable hours resulted in low gross margins. Now, with the GPS system installed in all their trucks, this bad practice is over.

Bobby and Lauren will be focusing on taking on a substantial number of new clients. This will be challenging for sure, but they are up to it. It looks like they are going to have a tremendous year.

As to their new safety program they are rolling this out so the crews will have this in place as they kick off the new season. ☺

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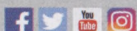


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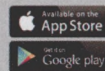
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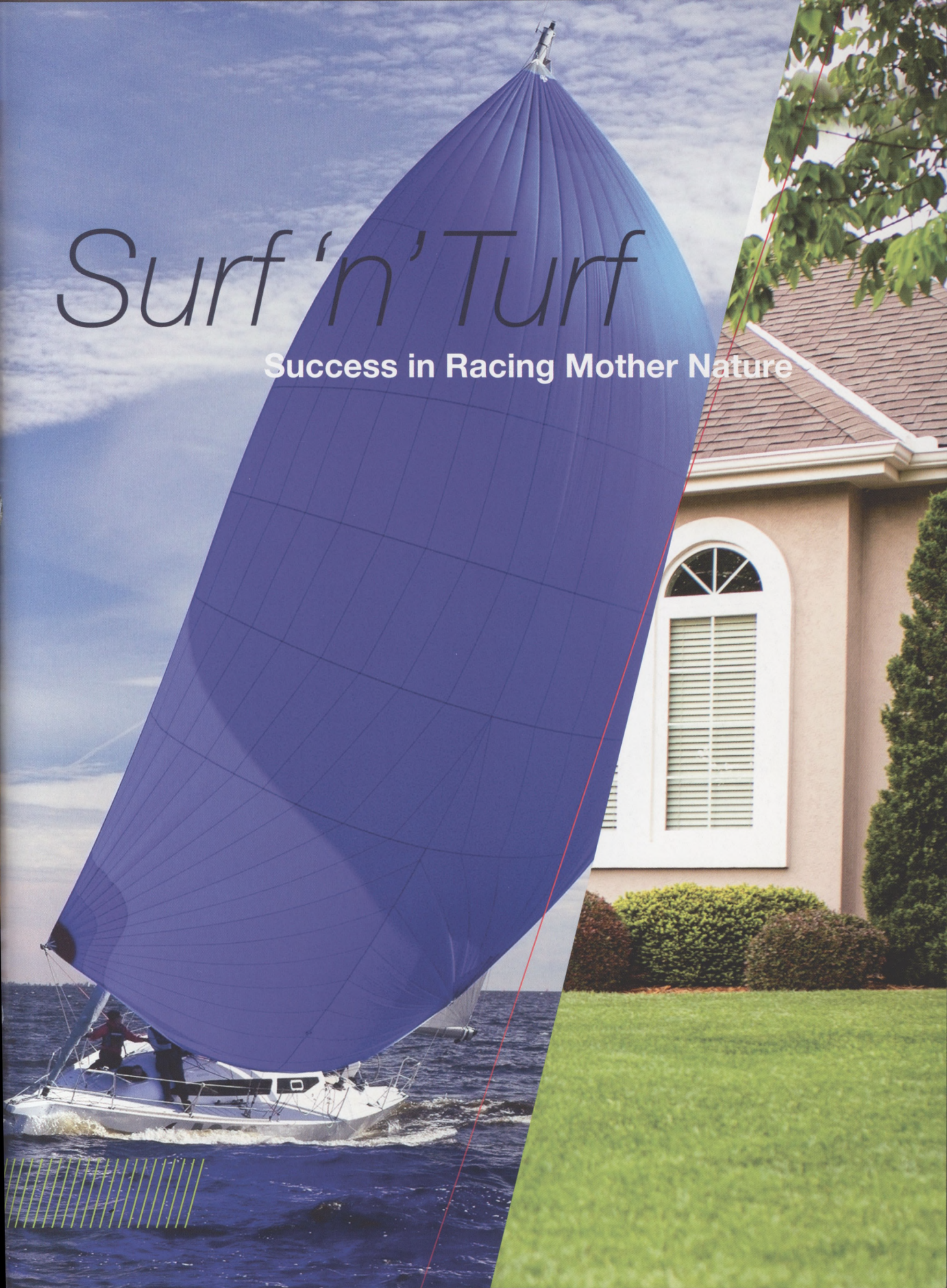
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Chris demonstrating the "Turf Tamer," one of the many proprietary innovations offered to Lawn Doctor customers.



On Wednesday nights, Chris races sailboats with a crew of anywhere from 8 to 15 people.

“When the wind speeds are 35-40 knots and we’re out there and it’s rough and there’s a storm approaching and we’ve got 5-to-8-foot swells and you think that your stomach’s going to churn, but it isn’t. You just get this sudden burst of energy ... to win.”

— **Chris Sherrington**
Lawn Doctor

"There are times that it's very exhilarating and times where you're absolutely exhausted and you just have to keep at it. I think everyone can relate to that – or we wouldn't be in this industry."

Chris Sherrington, Lawn Doctor Technical Director by day and sailboat racer by night, says he's been bleeding green for 17 years.

"I love everything about [the green industry] – the challenges and how difficult it can be and the rewards of seeing something change and turn around and be better. You never know what you're going to be facing tomorrow. It's always a challenge."

According to Chris, there are a lot of parallels between a sailboat race and the inevitable race against Mother Nature – something that lawn care professionals know all-too-well. But Chris says he's glad to have access to innovative products that make that race a bit easier to win.

"I'm always looking for new products with lower use rates that are easy to mix and handle and are safe not just for the environment and turfgrass, but for the operator as well," Chris says. "I look for the best products that deliver the highest standards and exceptional turfgrass conditions for our customers ... Bayer products have been a close companion along the way."

And, like Chris, Bayer takes that commitment to innovation seriously.

"I found in having conversations with Chris that he was impressed not only by the breadth of research we do at Bayer, but also the amount of energy and resources that go into bringing a new innovation into the market," says **Jake Duskocil, Ph.D.**, Manager of the Bayer Research & Education Center in Clayton, N.C.

There's comfort in that investment, according to Chris, who says that he knows Bayer is going to put in the time, the money and the research to ensure product excellence.

"There's always been a level of security in knowing that the Bayer name, the Bayer brand and what they stand for, is behind [a product]," Chris says. "It gives confidence to turf professionals that they're using a quality product that has been tried and tested."

Laurence Mudge, Manager of the Bayer Green Solutions Team, says that

confidence is by design. "Our customers buy our products, but what they're really buying is product plus a lot of expertise, a lot of backing, product knowledge, best management practices and guidance."

Chris says that kind of support is important. "Bayer has continued to deliver new and innovative products, research and development, solutions guides, rewards and incentives," he says.

For more than two decades, Bayer and Lawn Doctor have harbored a lot of trust.

"They know, after many years of dealing with different people at Bayer, that we're there in their best interest," says **Mike Dzurenko**, Bayer Lawn and Landscape Key Account Manager. "We put the customer at the center of everything we do."

And from Chris's point of view, that's evident.

"The level of service that I get working with Mike is amazing," Chris says. "A lot of our franchisees contact Mike... and he does such a great job of working with the Bayer Green Solutions Team to be able to come up with the right answers that they're looking for. That's rewarding to me and to Lawn Doctor as a company."

Chris might say that the secret to winning is anchored in precisely this kind of collaboration and teamwork.

"Sailing with a crew of anywhere from 8 to 15 people, we're trying to race and time precisely to keep our speed up. There's a huge teamwork effort there to be able to do that," Chris says. "Teamwork and precise timing on when to make a decision, on when to move forward, on when to take it to the next level... We all realize that working as a team, we can achieve more than if we just try to get at it alone."

Being first to the finish line means having the right tools and the right people working together at the right time.

"The green industry is continually changing, whether it's climate related, industry trends or demand," Chris says.

"You are facing those storms that are coming, and you're not sure how you're going to overcome. The flipside is when you see the results of your efforts in preparing for that – from hunkering down, getting through it and seeing the results."



Chris (right) says the Bayer Green Solutions Team – led by Laurence Mudge (left) – helps Lawn Doctor answer difficult technical questions about product selections.



Chris relies heavily on collaboration with his team and partners like Bayer. "We all realize that working as a team, we can achieve more than if we try to get at it alone," he says.

As Technical Director at Lawn Doctor, Chris provides training for new franchisees and leads the development of agronomic programs across the United States.

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— **Chris Sherrington**
Lawn Doctor



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Power play

MINKS LANDSCAPE CONTRACTORS

London, Kentucky

Minks Landscape Contractors' client in London, Kentucky, came to them with a wish list for a tranquil atmosphere for his family to enjoy after a long day as well as a fun place for his children and their friends to spend time together, complete with a swimming pool.

With that in mind, Minks set out to design a space the family could enjoy year-round. High voltage electric lines existing on the property seemed to stand in the way of the serene environment the client desired, so layout and design was critical.

The team at Minks said it took several different approaches before they figured out a layout that would satisfy the design aesthetic and their client's needs as well as something that would work with the placement of the 100-foot power line that runs over the client's backyard. Minks worked closely with the client and other contractors to make sure the pool house and covered patio, **below**, addition were cohesive with the design of the entire project.

A cave, waterfall and slide were incorporated into the project and a lagoon style pool, **below**, was constructed to create a soothing atmosphere. To soften the look of the project, organically shaped landscape beds were created and filled with colorful perennials. Hand hued natural stone was used to build the client a custom fireplace, **left**, located in the covered patio to be enjoyed all year. —*Lauren Rathmell*



The 100-foot-powerline that runs above this client's backyard was an aesthetic challenge for Minks Landscape Contractors.





Buckling down on design/build

How long will the robust construction market last? As landscape contractors reflect on the last recession, they're preparing with operational efficiencies and necessary price adjustments.

By Kristen Hampshire

Tim Austin learned a valuable lesson during the last big recession in 2008 and 2009: Run lean.

"When that recession hit, we focused on maintenance and snow removal instead of going out and competing for design/build jobs when the prices were getting driven down lower and lower," says Austin, president of A&H Lawn Service in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

Low overhead and labor efficiency are how Austin plans to weather the next storm, and he's expecting just modest growth this year. "The market is good now for landscaping and there are lots of jobs out there. Here in our area, construction is almost on the scary side, there's so much of it going on," he says. "You wonder when it's going to collapse again like it did before."

Customers are still willing to pay for quality, he says. "And, they value serviceability after the project is complete, and that's a big thing for us," says Austin, adding that when the market is down and design/build jobs taper off, maintenance is the company's bread and butter.

The same is true for Ryan Van Gieson, owner of RVG Landscaping in Wayne, New Jersey. He opened his business in 2014 and today has 12 full-time employees during the season with eight vehicles on the road. About 45 percent of his business is design/build, and the rest is maintenance and snow removal.

READY FOR RECESSION: Low overhead and labor efficiency is how Tim Austin, president of A&H Lawn Service, says he's preparing for an inevitable downturn.

This year, he'll go from two to one design/build crews. This will allow the "project guys" to fill in with landscaping work like mulching and planting during off-days. "We are trying to build this year around the possibility of the market (declining) in 2020," Van Gieson says.

WORKING SMARTER. Efficiency is the key to competitive pricing and making the most of an operation when times get tough. When the economy is booming, efficiencies pay off with higher profit margins. "We learned – don't rely on labor and buy the machinery to make a job go by faster," Van Gieson says.

Equipment for design/build jobs, such as track loaders and skid-steers with attachments, reduce the labor burden of these projects. "We can get away with a design/build crew with two people and put the third guy on another (maintenance) crew instead," Van Gieson says.

Van Gieson gets three-year leases on machines and when the period is up, he sells the equipment versus taking the buy-out price. "Sometimes we can get up to \$10,000 more than the buy-out price that way, and we take that money and recycle it by making a one-time payment on a three-year lease so we're good to go," he says. "The warranty is there, the service is there for no charge – it's phenomenal and there are no hidden expenses."

Austin is careful about how many installment loans A&H Lawn Service takes on. "We have a mindset of paying as we go for equipment, so when the Recession hit last time, we were able to keep a very low overhead," he says.

Equipment costs can eat up profitability and impact pricing structure, so he's also careful about buying equipment only when he knows the machines will stay busy.

Of course, materials and labor drive pricing – and with the tight labor market, finding good people to do the work hasn't been easy. This is why Van Gieson is focused on labor-saving equipment.

Pricing accuracy is essential. Austin says his company used to price projects by square foot or unit cost. "We had a base unit price and we measured square footage, and that is how we built out our design/build pricing," he says.

In 2016, A&H Lawn Service invested in a landscape management network software. Now, pricing figures in estimated time, overhead, markups, profit margin, hourly labor rate and materials costs. "The first year of using the software, we had the best year ever because we had a truer cost of materials," he says.

For example, the old way involved multiplying the materials price by two to get the installation/materials cost. So, a red maple at \$200 would cost \$400 to install. Or, a ginkgo tree for \$300 would cost \$600 to

install. The problem was, the labor cost is consistent but material prices were fluctuating up and down, making it harder for the company to be competitive. Plus, margins on jobs are better this way.

PUSHING UP PRICES. In the last 10 years, prices at A&H Lawn Service have increased about 25 to 30 percent because of labor, materials costs and general inflation. From 2008 to 2014, the average annual price increase for services was about 1.5 percent, Austin says. From 2014 to 2019, prices have jumped up about 3 percent annually.

But Austin says he isn't getting pushback on price increases for maintenance or design/build.

As for Van Gieson, prices climbed by 15 percent for maintenance clients this year. This is driven by the fact that he feels design/build business could decrease. Even with the increase, as of early March, 70 percent of existing clients had returned service contracts for the 2019 season. "Our clients are very supportive of us," he says.

He's OK with some customer attrition because with the labor market, he wants to fine-tune the residential client base to those who want weekly service and higher-end property owners.

"We picked up an extra 25 commercial properties, so when the recession comes, I can keep guys on full-time without having to cut anyone, as it stands now," Van Gieson says.

When addressing design/build pricing, maintenance is part of the big picture because the services balance each other.

"Every year, we have been growing substantially, but this is the only year where we're trying to downsize slightly yet shoot for the higher-end client," he says. "So, we're focused on doing a little less work and making more money."

That way, if the economy shifts come 2020, his business won't be ramped up to the extent that it's difficult to keep crews busy or maintain acceptable profit margins. Thoughtful growth is the theme.

"We don't try to grow too fast – slower, more manageable growth is better in case there is a downturn," Austin says. **L&L**



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finding the **right fit**



As more potential clients envision their perfect backyards – grilling on summer evenings, roasting marshmallows with their kids – the demand for outdoor living spaces has reached a fever pitch.

Thankfully for contractors, there are installation kit options that help them bring the clients' dreams to life. Without needing to learn masonry, these kits allow landscapers to create the same outdoors aesthetic that clients so desperately want. By asking clients specific questions on what they'd like their property to look like, contractors are able to select kits based on their customers' demands.

"Every year, someone thinks of one

more new thing from the indoor kitchen that they can bring to the outdoor," says Rob Wright, director of sales and marketing at Stone Age Manufacturing. "Ultimately, people like spending as much time outdoors as possible and yet they also like their comforts of the indoors. Anything that we can do to bring more of our indoor comforts into our outdoor living space, people seem to be up for."

While the materials to build someone's dream backyard might all come on one palette, the work isn't necessarily easy, especially if contractors don't do their research. If they know local law and avoid common mistakes, installation kits can help you build your business.

For contractors jumping into building outdoor amenities, installation kits might be the perfect starting point.

By Jimmy Miller

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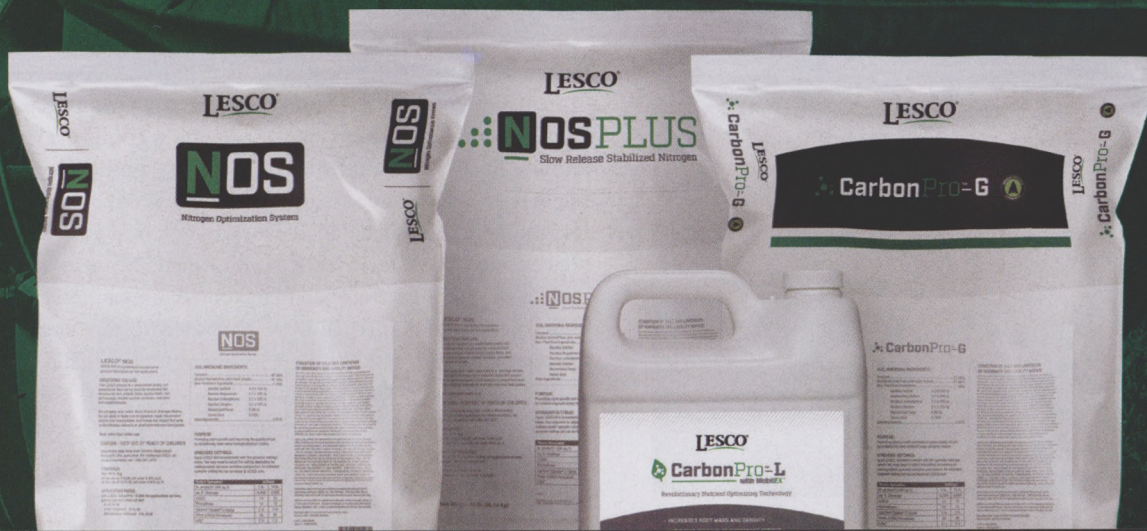
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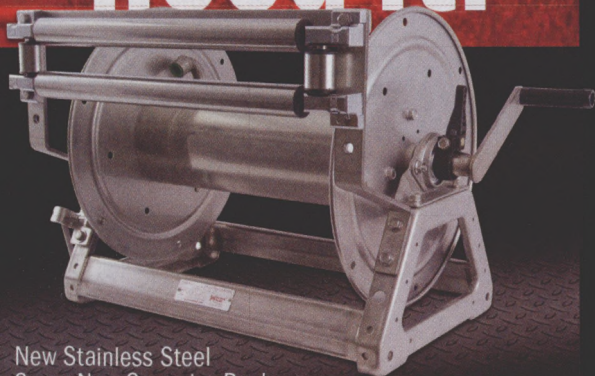
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WHY INSTALLATION KITS?

Wright says he's seen clients increasingly want outdoor living spaces over the last 10 or 15 years, and as landscapers take on more responsibility with less labor help, he thinks an installation kit can ease someone's skepticism about entering that segment of the market.

"The demand is there, and... we've always felt like it was a tremendous opportunity for the landscape contractors to be able to take more of that project instead of doing a small portion and watching someone else do the rest," Wright says.

Among all of Stone Age's kits, Wright says people most frequently purchase the 6-foot, 9-foot and 12-foot-long kits, often assembled in an L-shape and fairly basic in design. Wright says people like to keep the initial kitchen island pretty simple so they can build upon it later and add more amenities like a grill, sink or refrigerator.

Then there are firepits. SiteOne Hardscapes Category Director Chris Noone says these are often the backbone of an outdoor living space. Contractors can accentuate any of their designs with flames, an outdoor staple.

Noone says projects like these are "dramatically changing" the business for landscapers, who can appeal to their current or future clients by offering this in-demand service. With installation kits, contractors can build outdoor living spaces that others might need a well-trained mason to create. Plus, if somebody likes your service while maintaining their lawn, they may trust you to build their outdoor kitchen – or vice versa.

Belgard's Jenny Earnest, the

vice president of hardscapes, says contractors who shy away from hardscapes are generally helped by using modular elements in kits. Material costs might be higher by using kits, but labor costs are going to be much lower. She says the kits can mimic natural stone at the fraction of the learning curve and cost.

"Not all contractors are comfortable bidding on projects with extensive hardscape elements, and that's okay," Earnest says. "This is an opportunity to treat full-blown hardscape projects like incremental, goal-bound, profit opportunities."

READ UP. So, a client asks for an outdoor living space and you're ready to purchase an installation kit. How do you pick the right one?

Noone says knowing local ordinances can prevent you from promising clients something that can't legally be done. Take a fire pit for example: If that state or county doesn't allow for open flame, the entire design of what your client needs might change.

Also, look into what type of labor would be necessary to assemble any given kit. It's possible that some require equipment or manhours you simply can't provide, so asking questions of kit suppliers can help offer clarity on what's possible for your company to handle.

"If your name is going on that project, you've got pride in it, what are your capabilities?" Noone says. "The last thing you want to do is underperform."

Also, Wright suggests contractors look into the warranties. He says manufacturers, suppliers and contractors can often collaborate on specific warranty details so customers can have peace of mind, though he's seen many

“I’m a firm believer that education is the key to repeat business.”

CHRIS NOONE, SiteOne Hardscapes Category director



outdoor kits go under a five-year warranty and fireplaces are tabbed with a 25-year warranty.

Noone says manufacturing defects might be covered for life, and some warranties transfer from homeowner to homeowner if a client moves away.

Some installation kit suppliers offer educational lessons or forums to help answer any contractor questions about how to properly use their products. Wright urges landscapers to reach out with any concerns they have along the way, and Noone says his staff is comprised of certified instructors. It’s just as much in it for manufacturers as it is contractors that the latter understands how to use their kits.

“I’m a firm believer that education is the key to repeat business,” Noone says. “If they go out and have a bad experience putting together a firepit that’s kitted up for them, and it’s just not a good customer experience, they’re probably not going to do it again.”

LEARN FROM OTHERS. Imagine showing up

to a jobsite with an installation kit loaded up on a skid-steer, ready to move it to a client’s house only to realize something deflating – that the homeowner long ago built an un-navigable fence around their backyard.

“Sometimes people get so excited that, ‘Hey, I’ve got this job. Maybe it’s a great new opportunity for me to diversify my business’ that they forget the small steps, the checks,” Noone says.

The success of an installation kit comes down to the builder. When the project is completed and has things like surrounding pavers or mulch, the installation kits really stand out.

“It looks much better when they touch it. I always joke around that everything we have looks okay on a palette, but once it gets out on a job, it’s got everything that goes with it,” Noone says. “They always somehow tend to make it better than what you assume what you will have, and I think that is the creativity of the contractors and the beauty behind what they do.” **L&L**



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There can be nearly instant gratification in a shoreline erosion project – encouraging a living seawall and growth of submerged underwater vegetation. “You might not see a customer get starry-eyed over the picture on paper, but when they see it go into the ground and find out how much of a positive impact it makes, they are amazed and we solved their problem,” says Lucas Lees, head of coastal and environmental design for Unity Landscaping in Church Hill, Maryland, along the state’s eastern shore.

“And, once the project is fully grown or established, we hear back from clients who say,

‘My kids are playing by the water and there are baby fish, crabs, turtles and ducks,’” Lees says. “Within a year, wildlife can move back in and it shows how we can restore the shoreline.”

Education is the key to selling and executing shoreline restoration projects that prevent erosion. “When people are aware of what we are doing and the science behind it, they can wrap their heads around it,” Lees says.

The benefits clients realize from shoreline erosion control and stabilization projects include enhanced views, better shoreline access, a restored wildlife habitat and increased property values, says Bret Huntman, president of North by Nature Landscapes in Petosky, Michigan. “Most of our customers have seen or experienced significant loss of property at

the water’s edge,” he says. “They have seen other sea wall and rock installations fail. They are looking for long-term, self-sustaining solutions and most often, naturalizing their shoreline is that solution.”

What does it mean to naturalize a shoreline?

“We believe erosion is best treated by restoring the structure of the shore and respecting the natural beauty of the region,” says Bobbie Burdick, president of Burdick & Associates in Ellsworth, Maine.

In Maine, stable shorelines include exposed bedrock with soil and tree roots. “We use techniques drawn from the principles of bio-engineering to analyze and stabilize eroded slopes,” Burdick says.

Education involves explaining the nature of erosion in the environment. “We discuss the impacts of tides, poor soil, lack of vegetation and other stabilizing materials,” Burdick says.



S.O.S.

(SAVE OUR SHORELINES)

Market, sell and execute successful erosion control and shoreline restoration projects. **By Kristen Hampshire**

Ultimately, these erosion-control/restoration projects are “about preserving the shoreline for future generations,” she says.

SAVING SHORELINES. Frequently, property owners do not realize the importance of shoreline restoration and stabilization, Burdick says. “We are often called to a site for other reasons and discover areas of erosion in our site analysis for the client’s landscape design,” she says. “At that point, we have a discussion about the importance of preserving the Maine shoreline and ways we can support them.”

Shoreline erosion is the result of manipulating lake levels with dams or drainage canals so they are “out of their banks,” Huntman says. “Now, new shorelines are being sculpted by wave and ice action.”

On the Chesapeake Bay, Lees shares how tidal waters interact with the shoreline and the resulting wave energy triggers a much faster type of erosion than raindrops falling on a parking lot, for instance. “There is different

type of erosion – some is visible, some is not,” Lees says. “Some erosion is immediate and noticeable, and other erosion occurs miles away from the shoreline.”

If you don’t stop erosion, the wave energy will eventually eat up your water’s edge and can cause property damage. Not to mention, an eroding shoreline is a real hit to the environment and wildlife that takes up residence in these habitats.

Unity Landscaping specializes in creating living shorelines, which is a sustainable alternative to installing vertical, hard seawalls. And, the state essentially requires that property owners use this method, Lees says. “With this method, we are creating habitat, reducing soil and sediment in the Bay and creating a diverse, cool ecosystem that will promote butterflies, fish, crabs and the wildlife that people appreciate here,” he says.

Not all clients care about the environmental benefits. In that case, Lees instead will focus on the cost-effectiveness of a natural approach

vs. installing bulkhead or a seawall. “We have a conversation about the fact that the state requires (a natural approach), and it’s a cheaper solution – plus you have an opportunity to gain property,” he says. “So, we emphasize the fact that when they add property, they are also increasing their property value.”

Huntman says the best marketing and sales associate is Mother Nature herself.

“She usually shouts it out loud and clear,” he says. “We are allied with local conservation organizations and lake associations, as well.”

Lees also says that becoming Chesapeake Bay Landscape Professional Certified puts his company on the radar with other certified professionals who might refer business to Unity Landscaping. And, he targets areas for erosion control and shoreline restoration that are directly impacted by this issue. “We look at all of the (waterfront) and riverfront areas in nearby counties and consider the threat of erosion,” he says.

Continues on pg. 140



Get up to speed on the different applications you can do with this equipment.

HYDROSEEDING

By
Lauren
Rathmell

IT ONLY REQUIRES a relatively simple piece of equipment, but hydroseeding – when done the right way – can create lush, green lawns for your clients.

“Basically, it’s a tank, engine and pump,” says Ron Ciolfi, eastern market development manager for FINN Corporation. Part of his job is to help train customers to use equipment like hydroseeders. Ciolfi says the training that goes into using the machine is fairly intuitive, so adding the service to your business can be simple.

At Turfmaker, James Lincoln, president, also says that learning the functions of the machine can be relatively easy.

"Many people learn to use their machines with no instruction," he says. "That's just a matter of pushing the right button and pulling, right? Something with more skill – it's not terribly skillful ... something you have to learn is to how to evenly spray the (slurry)."

WHY SPRAY? An obvious reason to enlist the work of a hydroseeder is to get grass to grow, but Ciolfi says it could be related to law compliance. In some states, any earth that has been moved must be stabilized, which can be done with a hydroseeder.

"If a contractor has a large area that's going to have a strip mall put in, they might need to stabilize the ground after they're done clearing and grading... there might be an area that they need to stabilize during construction." Stabilizing ensures the soil won't move from the construction site to another location – like a neighbor's yard or a body of water.

When used to stabilize an area, an organic solution made of recycled newspaper or woodchips is mixed into a slurry that Ciolfi describes as a "green oatmeal." For stabilizing purposes, the slurry is made thick.

ROOM TO GROW. When used to grow grass, things get a little more precise. First and foremost, Lincoln asks the right questions.

"What kind of work are you going to be doing? (They) tell me that (they are) going to be primarily be doing home lawns and landscape type stuff, or ... going to be doing pipeline work or ... going to be doing highway work," Lincoln says. "And when we're talking highway work or pipeline work or some kind of reclamation work, we're talking about many, many acres. When we're talking about home lawn and landscape, we're typically talking anywhere from a tenth of an acre to a fifth of an acre to maybe an acre."

For a residential lawn, Lincoln says a contractor doesn't need a big machine, but for a large commercial project, a larger machine may come in handy. "You would not do the smaller jobs with a giant machine and there's a lot of argument to say you wouldn't do the giant jobs with a little machine," he says.



As a machine, hydroseeders are fairly intuitive to use but knowing the right way to spray takes some training.

SPRAY ON. Using the hydroseeder may be easy but there is a more in-depth method to determining the mixes and materials to use.

"It's a tank with an engine and a pump and someone just needs to know a little bit about soil and how the machine works," Ciolfi says. "It's very easy put stuff in the tank to mix it up and engage the pump."

Ciolfi recommends consulting your state's local turf school recommendations when it comes to grass seed selection, but generally he says he would typically spray around 2,200 to 2,500 pounds of slurry per acre on a residential lawn.

Wood fibers or recycled newspaper fibers can be used as a mix for the slurry, and Ciolfi says sometimes a gluey substance will be included to ensure the mixture stays put.

The rate at which the slurry is applied determines how thick or thin the covering will be, and Lincoln says it also makes the difference when it comes to pricing.

A thin layer won't use as much product, but it also could leave a sub-par application for your client. On the flip side, an application that is too thick could waste product and cost you more in the long run.

DETERMINING RATE. "What I instruct new people to do that are not going to have any hands-on instruction is to first determine how much area you want this tank load to cover," Lincoln says. "We know that we've put X number of pounds of mulch in the tank. We know that we've put this much seed in the tank and the amount of seed we put in the tank is governed by how much area we intend to cover because your seed rates are always based on so many pounds of seed per 1,000 square feet."

HYDRAULICS OR MECHANICS?

JIM LINCOLN, PRESIDENT OF TURFMAKER, says contractors have a choice between hydraulic hydroseeders and mechanical machines.

Hydraulic hydroseeders allow the operator to turn the auger inside the tank for starting purposes. If you need to be able to turn that auger at different speeds, even in reverse, a hydraulic machine would be beneficial. "You can vary the speed of the auger side of the tank and you can run it in reverse if you've got a hydraulically driven machine," he says. "What that gets you is running the auger at a slower speed. Then running at a fast speed to mix your slurry is important to get it mixed in solution and ready to go quickly."

Another plus side to a hydraulic machine is the ability to reverse the pump in case of a clog.

"Clogs can be a pain in the butt," he says. "So, for the guy that's got an extra 3 or 4 or \$5,000 to spend, there a certain amount of logic leaning toward hydraulics."

Lincoln suggests telling a new operator to measure 5,000 square feet of area to get an idea of what that much land looks like.

"Literally go after and measure all 5,000 square feet and then start spraying with a relatively fine nozzle and get the 5,000 square feet covered where you're moving your fine spray nozzle fairly quickly," he says.

Once the 5,000 square feet has been covered, he suggests going back to the tank to see how much mixture you have left.

"You'll probably have some thin spots," Lincoln says. "So go back and make the application as easy as possible so that you get an idea of how thick you need to spray." **L&L**

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APPLICATION OVERHAUL

By Kate Spirgen

When it comes to setting up your spray rigs, the first thing to think about is the products you're putting down, says Joel Marden, owner of Green Up Lawn Care in Louisiana. "There are tons of options when it comes to tank materials, and you've got to know what's going to work best for you and what you're working with," he says.

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LAWN CARE

Aaron Schultz, operations manager at Johnson's Lawn Care in Indiana, starts in the same place. He says his company has had the same setup for the last three years when the company configured its first spray rig.

"We started by looking at what was going to be the most efficient for all of the different applications the guys put down throughout the year," he says, noting that he started by taking the suggestions on the chemical labels.

For example, if you use chemicals that require constant agitation, you'll need to make sure that you're working with a tank that provides that. Otherwise, you won't be making even, safe applications.

And safety is always top of mind when it comes to chemical applications at Johnson's. "We're rigorous when it comes to making sure that everyone has their PPE; everyone knows what's in the tank and where they should be spraying before the trucks roll out," he says.

Marden uses a combination of backpack sprayers and a skid sprayer with two separate tanks — one for total kill and one for other applications. But no matter what, he says cleaning out the systems has to happen at the shop.

Schultz also has a two-tank system so that crews can handle any spot applications they might need throughout their routes. "We've got the general pre-emergent or post-emergent, depending on the time of year, but we don't want the guys to have to come back to the shop or make another visit just to handle a spot application," he says. "It's just not efficient."

KEEP TRUCKS MOVING. The size of the properties your crews will

be visiting is also a key consideration. "You want to make sure your guys aren't running back and forth to fill up the tank," he says, adding that while you can carry extra tanks on trucks, he prefers one tank per day to avoid spillage or accidents.

Each crew is routed for application of a single product to avoid misapplications as well. Because different lawns will require different rates and products, he says careful routing is the key to efficiency.

"You don't want to mess around with this stuff," he says. "I always tell my guys to check application rates, read the labels and follow instructions. The last thing you want is dead spots or ruined lawns. Callbacks aren't going to fix something as big as that."

He wants to make sure that his hoses are set up to minimize mistakes as well. He outfits his spray rig with a double pass hose, rather than a single pass, since they're stronger and can handle more pressure.

"No point in taking risks where you don't have to," he says. His crews are also responsible for flipping the hose every month to cut down on wear and tear. And they inspect the rig and backpack sprayers regularly for leaks, pressure issues and clogs.

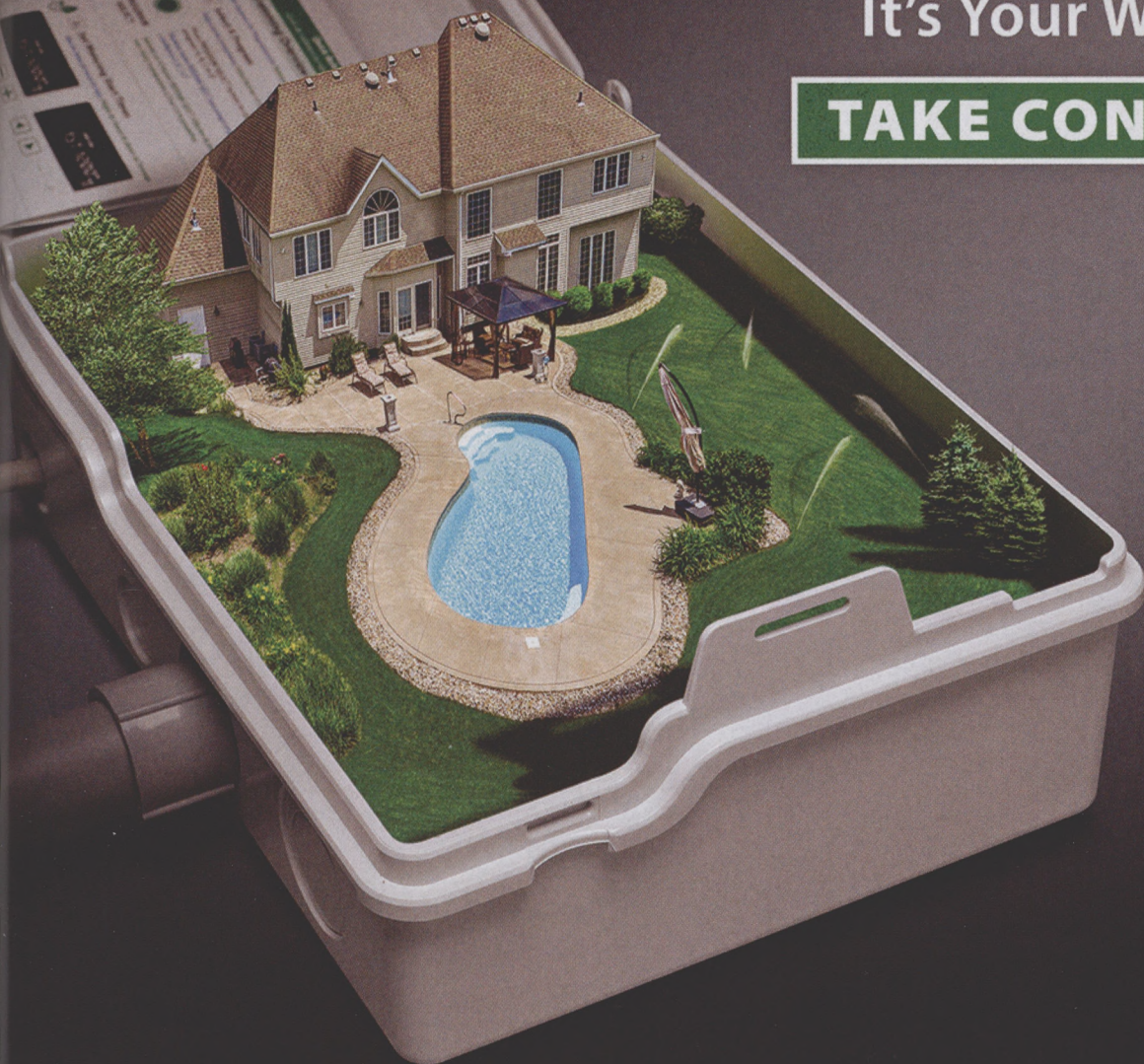
"Keep it running smoothly and you're going to save yourself so many headaches," he says.

At Johnson's, inspections are done once a week and at the end of the season to ensure that everything is ready to sit over the winter months.

"You don't want to leave anything to chance," Schultz says. "Anything you don't completely flush out is going to be a huge problem come next season." **L&L**

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**EXPERTS SAY IT'S
HARD TO DECIDE** WHICH
PESTS WILL BE THE MOST
PROBLEMATIC THIS SEASON.

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By Jimmy Miller

PESTS

With much of the country coming out of a warmer and wetter winter, experts across the nation say it's hard to anticipate how the weather will affect the insect pressures once the summer gets rolling. However, one thing's for sure: Damaged or diseased turf means there's an increased chance those spots are susceptible to pest problems this season.

"The best defense against any pest is going to be healthy, dense, well-managed turf," says Becky Grubbs, an assistant professor and turfgrass specialist at Texas A&M University. "It can be a good time when you're seeing pressure to check in with, 'Am I irrigating appropriately? Am I mowing appropriately? Am I fertilizing appropriately?'"



GYPSY MOTH.

For those in the northeast, gypsy moths might pose a threat this summer.



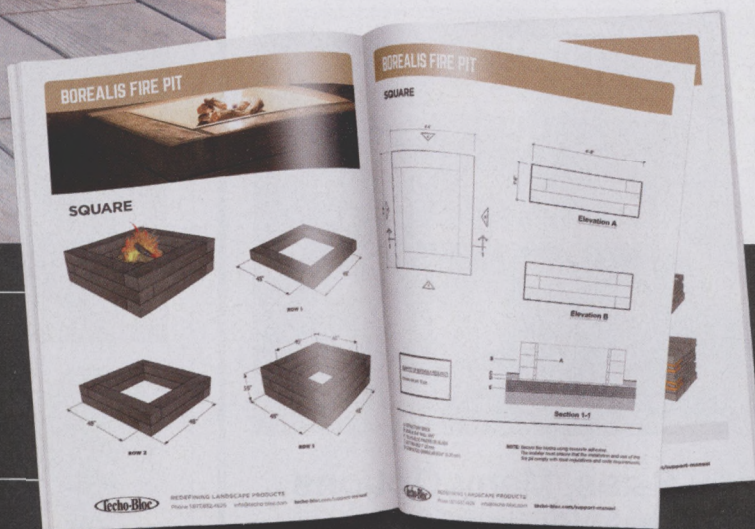
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MOLE CRICKET. Early signs of mole crickets this season don't necessarily mean they will be the biggest threat.

Grubbs says most of the country faced “prolific” rainfall this winter, so cool-weather weeds and some diseases may have already emerged on lawns. North Carolina State University’s Rick Brandenburg, an extension turf specialist, says it’s still too early to decide what the major pest and insect pressures will exactly be.

Brandenburg says coastal states had a big problem with fall armyworms – which don’t overwinter – last year, so they’ll have to start at square one with those. He’s also already seen some fire ants and mole crickets on the edge of his own yard. But expecting those to remain the biggest problems is a fool’s game, Brandenburg says.

“It’s really hard to predict what that means. Every time I do, it seems like I’m wrong,” Brandenburg said. “There are so many factors that are into it. We talk about, ‘Are the

pests going to be early this year? Are they going to be delayed? My experience as far as the timing of these pests, it has more to do with the month of April than it does January, February, because even if the temperatures are warmer, to a bug, they’re still cool.”

WHAT TO DO. While it’s difficult to know what the biggest pressures of this summer will be, there are certain precautions available for combatting the year’s nastiest pests.

Richard Buckley is the director of the Plant Diagnostic Lab and Nematode Detection Service at Rutgers University, and he says his area of the country will likely be watching out for tent caterpillars, spotted lanternflies and gypsy moths.

But he recommends looking up historical data on properties to see what has overwintered in the past and watch for those warning

signs, such as egg masses. The data should also show trends in what certain pest species come as a result of particular weather.

“The key is to be out there looking so you can monitor when they start, and if it’s earlier or later, you’ll know,” Buckley says. “With insects, it’s all about surgical strike. You see them, you count them, you figure out what part of their life cycle is most vulnerable, and then you attack as necessary.”

Buckley also recommends talking with local experts and researchers, especially at the county level. Because it’s too early to know what pests will be most prevalent, he says finding local guidance is the best practice, whether they help you find solutions for particular pests or offer warning signs on insects to watch out for.

Brandenburg says that in theory, the warmer winter probably didn’t kill off insects like cold temperatures usually do.

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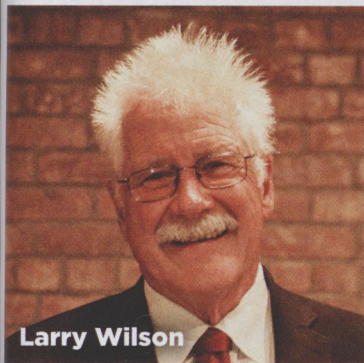
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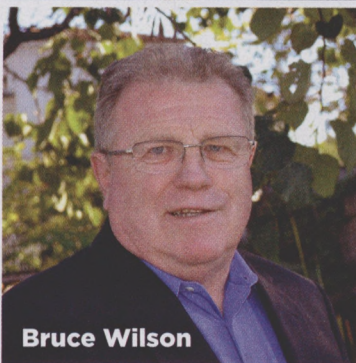
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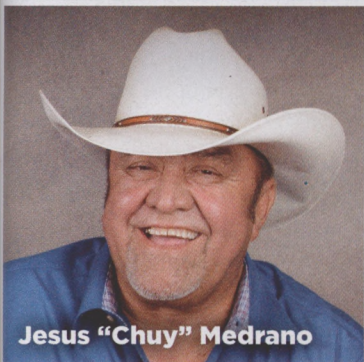
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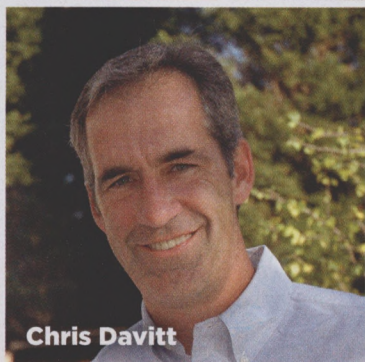
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“The key is to be out there looking so you can monitor when they start, and if it’s earlier or later, you’ll know.”

RICHARD BUCKLEY, Rutgers University

But if temperatures don’t heat up quickly in April and May, those populations might still be low entering June like they are now. Finding a local expert could help ease that uncertainty as the season wears on.

“It’s easy to say that since it’s been a warm winter, that you’ve had more pests overwintering but at the same time, you’ve had more of their natural enemies,” Brandenburg says. “Does that balance it out? When it’s warmer and wet, there are natural pathogens that attack insects. Those are all things that really are hard to answer, and sometimes there are subtle differences in a winter that we don’t pick up on that probably influence those situations.”

WHAT LIES AHEAD. Brandenburg says there could be some biologicals on the way to help ward off insects, and for the first time in his career, the tests he’s running with these

products are just as successful as tried-and-true chemicals.

He won’t say which products he’s tested as they’re still unreleased, but Brandenburg believes the increased societal and governmental pressure to avoid pesticide use will continue to lead to more alternatives. The race is on to find the most successful biologicals, Brandenburg says, and they’ll continue to become significant factors to consider moving forward.

“There may be a greater marketplace for them ever,” Brandenburg says. “It may make these products in greater demand than in the past. We’re finding they really can stand side-by-side with pesticides.”

Grubbs also says there may be some products out soon but the government shutdown earlier this year may have slowed the EPA approval process. The delay could take a few more months, extending well past this season.

This should still allow LCOs ample time to look into the latest options for combatting pests. She recommends going to state turfgrass and nursery meetings to get updates on what’s going on the industry, and keeping regular contact with your state turfgrass specialists will help you stay in the know on what products are available.

“A lot of times, somebody like me or some of my peers in similar positions, we’re doing the trial work on the later end of those products being developed,” Grubbs says. “It allows us to have some familiarity with the products, how they perform, and what products are imminent to being released.”

As with anything else regarding insects, the experts think closely surveying the market – and your lawns – is the solution.

“It’s just keeping your eyes open,” Brandenburg says. “That’s about it.” **L&L**



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Q&A WITH THE EXPERT

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT SOFTWARE



Q&A WITH KEVIN KEHOE

Founder, The Aspire Software Company

1 What is business management software (BMS)?

A: BMS is an integrated cloud based system for running your company from sales to invoicing. The system houses all your information and transactions maintaining a complete history of every estimate, time sheet, purchase and invoice. It is mobile so you can work from anywhere, keep everyone on the same page and improve communications and execution. Best of all it becomes your standard operating procedure so you can maximize efficiency and deliver best in class customer service.



2 Why should I invest in it?

A: BMS is the single most important investment you will make in the next decade. Scaling profitably without a BMS is impossible. Your customers are going to demand faster responses, immediate communication and proactive account services. Your people are going demand it also – especially the new generation who likes working for tech-wise companies. You can't manage from a month-end P&L anymore without losing money because you

are making decisions that are too late to matter. In short, without a BMS you will find it hard to stay competitive and make money.

3 How much is the investment and the return?

A: BMS is delivered as SaaS (software as a subscription service). The fees for Aspire for example are based on a small percentage of revenue. So, whether you pay by revenue, user or something else within

five years, all modern BMS software will employ a SaaS pricing. ROI is immediate and measurable in reduced hours, materials, and administrative overhead ... instead of "throwing bodies at the systems problem" you will pay a small fee to use software. The increases in productivity and reductions in costs outweigh the fees.

4 What should I look for when investing in software?

A: The first requirement

is capacity as you want a software partner with the staffing, finances, and product road map to grow with you. Second, you want full integration and mobility that ties sales, service, scheduling, purchasing, shop and the office together. Third, you want a cloud based platform that delivers frequent upgrades, API's and plug-ins. Last, you want full user documentation and support where you can get help when you need it.

5 When should I think about investing in software?

A: If you produce more than \$2MM in annual revenue and are using outdated technology requiring multiple applications, lots of paper, and data re-entry, you should consider a BMS. Further, in today's world, the most expensive option is writing your own. Just ask those who have tried this approach. Once upon a time that may have been an option, but today the cost to write and manage your own images little sense when there are people who have already done this for you. It is far better to work with them and focus on what you do best.



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Q&A WITH THE EXPERT

2019 SNOW SHOW AND EXECUTIVE SUMMIT



Q&A WITH KEVIN GILBRIDE

Executive Director, ASCA

1 Why offer the two events back-to-back this year?

That's a great question. Like many of the programs we've developed with the Accredited Snow Contractors Association (ASCA) and Snow Magazine, we are constantly evolving to meet the needs of the professional snow and ice industry. And as such, we continuously seek out opportunities to better serve professional contractors. In past years we've held ASCA Snow Show in the spring/early summer while the events of the previous winter are still fresh in snow pros minds. In contrast, ASCA Executive Summit has traditionally been held in August as industry leaders begin to gear-up their snow and ice management operations for the coming winter season. This year, though, we're combining the two events into a one-week back-to-back event in Pittsburgh that begins with ASCA Snow Show on Tuesday, July 30 and Wednesday, July 31, followed by ASCA Executive Summit on Thursday, Aug. 1 and Friday, Aug. 2. By doing this, we're offering the snow and ice management industry greater access to two marquee annual events.

2 What can attendees expect during the 2019 ASCA Snow Show?

ASCA Snow Show is an excellent educational opportunity for the snow and ice management community. We've developed an Industry Standards-based curriculum that will take place concurrently in three classrooms. One is solely devoted to 100-Level classes so attendees can earn their ASCA-C certifications on site during the event. Another room is focused on panel discussions addressing a variety of industry-specific topics. The third room features industry experts addressing numerous operational issues. Out on the show floor, attendees can experience the latest equipment and high-tech offerings from the industry's leading manufacturers and suppliers. In addition, attendees will have exclusive one-on-one access with company reps to discuss how the latest equipment and cutting-edge materials will benefit their operations, as well as discuss purchasing and financing options.

3 Why would a contractor wish to stay for ASCA Executive Summit? For nearly a decade, the

ASCA Executive Summit has developed into *the* industry leadership event. In addition to an agenda of next-level business development speakers and the Leadership and Top 100 awards, ASCA Executive Summit is an outstanding venue for networking and collaboration among industry professionals. In fact, when we survey ASCA Executive Summit attendees, nearly everyone cites networking and peer collaboration as the chief value they gained from their summit experience. By pairing ASCA Snow Show with ASCA Executive Summit, we've created a way for more snow and ice professionals to attend and take advantage of both the educational resources and peer-to-peer opportunities of the ASCA Executive Summit experience.

4 What are the Leadership and Top 100 awards?

Every year we compile winter revenue data from participating snow and ice companies to develop the annual Top 100 list. If interested, you can access past years' Top 100 lists on the Snow Magazine website. As part of a formal dinner held during ASCA Executive Summit, company

representatives in attendance receive plaques and recognition for their placement on the Top 100 list. The annual Leadership awards recognize industry individuals who practice outstanding leadership skills in their companies, in the industry, and in the communities they work and live in. Since its inception in 2010, we've honored 35 members of the professional snow and ice management community with Leadership awards.

5 Why did you choose Pittsburgh as the host city for this year's events?

Not only is Pittsburgh a great snow city, but it is also a great host city that offers a vast array of activities and nightlife for attendees to explore, experience and take advantage of during their free time. Most importantly, though, it's a crossroads destination within five hours of a number of major snow and ice markets. Likewise, for those contractors residing a bit farther away, it's a relatively easy city to fly into. We were looking for an affordable, quality destination that would be an easy, convenient drive for a good portion of the industry.

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Q&A WITH THE EXPERT ATTACHMENTS



Q&A WITH GLENN DANUSER

Co-owner, Danuser Machine Company

1 Knowing that Danuser was established in 1910, how does a fourth-generation family owned business not only survive, but thrive in the attachments business?

A: Remember how you made it that long and strive to maintain the same philosophy moving forward. You must be willing to embrace change. Maintaining quality and designing innovative attachments has been a large part of our success and continued longevity.

2 You're best known for 3 point post hole diggers like the F8 but recently you've launched several other attachments, an example is the Intimidator Tree & Post Puller. Where does the inspiration for something like the Intimidator come from?

A: Customers asked us to build a tree puller for years. We didn't want to build the same tree puller design like others so Engineering and Sales got together to discuss different ideas and expectations. After hours and hours of testing, we came up with other ideas and different ways to make the job easier. We also had to realize that some

customers have small skid-steers and others have larger ones. So, we had to take that in consideration.

3 So how does an operator know the best brand to buy?

A: Ask others in the same industry, talk to your equipment dealer, and check their social media for what customers have to say. Customer service is very important. Send them an email for suggestions and ask questions about their products. How and when they get back to you gives you an idea of what you can expect after you become a customer.

4 How can these attachments save landscape contractors time and money?

A: Most of our attachments can do more than one task. Some are one-person operation which allows other employees to do other jobs or tasks to save time and money. Our attachments are low maintenance which helps you spend more time serving customers.

5 Can you give us a sneak peak of what Danuser has in development for in 2019?

A: We are working on a 3rd plant expansion which will add more manufacturing space. We have at least 3-4 new product ideas that we are keeping close to the vest, so stay tuned!

6 What steps does Danuser take before a product launch to ensure a high-quality product?

A: We test with several methods. We test the strength and functionality of the product.

Then we move up to testing in a similar environment. Then we will test in an actual setting with a large machine trying to produce field failures. After all is complete, then it goes out to several others for hours, weeks, months, and sometimes years before we consider it ready for market. Before it is launched, it goes to my farm for final testing. We are a firm believer that we need to do all the testing instead of letting our customers do it.



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Q&A WITH THE EXPERT

IMMIGRATION UPDATE



Q&A WITH KEVIN LASHUS

Board Certified Immigration Lawyer, FisherBroyles, LLP

1 How does one get involved in Immigration Law?

A: After graduation from The University of Texas School of Law, I was one of Senator Cornyn's hires when he was Attorney General of Texas (before he became Senator). After three years representing the State as a litigator, it became time for me to follow my wife to the Bay Area for her Post Doc. On September 7, 2001, I interviewed with DOJ INS and the U.S. Attorney's Office for the Northern District of California . . . then, September 11th happened. The gentleman I interviewed with from the U.S. Attorney's Office was Robert Mueller . . . and, he was immediately tasked with becoming the FBI chief. I accepted the job with DOJ INS on September 14th and have been an immigration attorney ever since: 6 years as a terror prosecutor and the past 12 in private practice.

2 You may have the largest H-2B law practice in the country; how did you get into the H-2B business?

A: Because of my experience with DHS ICE, I primarily marketed our practice as a verification compliance (Form

I-9) practice: I-9 audits and criminal-related immigration defense. Many of my first clients were in the landscaping maintenance/landscape installation industry. We protected our clients from losing large segments of their active workforces with supplemented temporary foreign workers. We've now expanded the practice to represent landscapers with DOL audits, new corporate formation, and permanent residency for their temporary workers.

3 How has the H-2B practice evolved over the recent past?

A: We've run up against a bunch of new challenges. First, the agency decided to artificially inflate the market wage for workers (wages are still higher than market wages in most markets); and, now we're dealing with

the new reality: we've lost an entire generation of craft workers. Kids coming out of High School today have been tracked to apply and attend college. We've closed vocational schools and no longer have kids interested in apprenticeships with craft artisans, like landscape managers, architects, and horticulturalists. My clients are telling me that kids would prefer work at local coffee shops or retail rather than learn a lifelong trade. It seems like this generation has decided certain jobs are below them . . . combine that with record un- and underemployment rates, and there are just not enough available workers across many industries—not just landscape maintenance. As a result, the visa category has been significantly oversubscribed; way too many employers for too few visas.

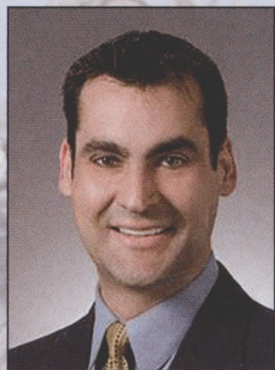
MY CLIENTS ARE TELLING ME THAT KIDS WOULD PREFER WORK AT LOCAL COFFEE SHOPS OR RETAIL RATHER THAN LEARN A LIFELONG TRADE.

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4 It appears that the Legislature understands that the more visas show be allocated because it keeps giving discretionary authority to the Homeland Secretary to release the visas. Do you know why more visas haven't been released?

A: I don't. It doesn't make political sense to our clients. USCIS is issuing visas based upon a random lottery as the visas are allocated. It would seem to me that this is a relatively easy fix. This isn't an immigration issue; it's a labor issue. My clients would tell you: their H-2B workers are loyal, they're law abiding, they want to work as much as the clients will work them, AND they always, always return home because they want to come back year over year. Most H-2Bs have no interest in becoming a U.S. Citizen. They want to legally work in the United States and save up enough to spend the rest of their lives in their country of origin with their families. The workers are willing to sacrifice years away from their families to make enough money that they can eventually return and live comfortably for the rest of their lives. This is a program that works. We gotta fix it.

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Q&A WITH THE EXPERT

PROPERTY MEASUREMENT



Q&A WITH MIKE RORIE

CEO, Go iLawn

Property measurement is an essential function that impacts the performance of every landscape business. **Go iLawn's CEO Mike Rorie** discusses how you can optimize property measurement to increase profit, reduce expenses, save time and gain competitive advantage.

1 What's the biggest property measurement mistake?

A: Not having a strong system. Think about it. Property measurement is the foundation your entire business is built on. You use measurements to build your estimates, build your sales proposals, build your budgets, build your operations... So if you have a weak measuring system, it weakens every aspect of your business.

2 How should I start strengthening my property measurement system?

A: Start with increasing the Speed, Accuracy and Efficiency of your system. In today's world, this means using an online measuring tool like Go iLawn.

It lets you quickly, accurately measure and estimate

properties before spending an unpredictable (and costly) amount of time and fuel visiting them. You'll immediately add valuable cost controls and productivity advantages to your measuring process.

3 Who should do the measuring?

A: Salespeople can measure, but I don't think they should. Smaller landscape companies can quickly train non-experienced, lower cost labor (admins, part-timers, even students) to provide accurate

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property measurements using online tools.

Larger companies might hire a dedicated measurer. In both cases, well paid salespeople are freed to focus on their higher value, profit producing work.

4 What's a way measuring can provide competitive advantage?

A: Beyond knowing your real numbers, think visual communication. Remember, a picture says a thousand words... Impress your prospects by "showing them" how your measurements relate to the specific work you'll perform on their property. It sets your proposal apart from competitors and lets you demonstrate immediate value to your potential customer. You can also visually communicate with your crews by creating sitemaps. It establishes immediate understanding of

the work to be done, promotes productivity and prevents problems. Effective, mistake free operations is the ultimate competitive advantage.

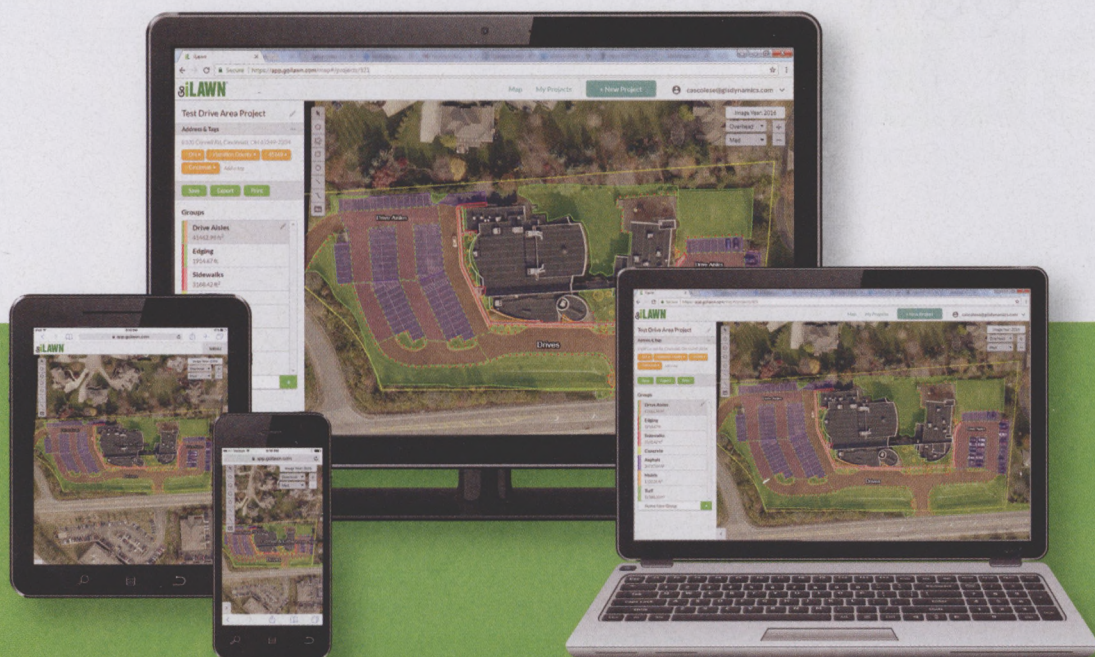
5 What are the benefits of using Go iLawn?

A: There are too many to list here. But a big one is Retention. Go iLawn gives you the ability to retain all your property measurements, images and information in the cloud. These measurements become your "property intelligence" assets.

You can access and update them at anytime, regardless of who did the original measuring.

It creates a visual record of the work you do for customers over the years. Periodic review of your customer's sitemap provides a unique platform and opportunity to sell them additional value added services and help retain them longer.

It's Your Property Intelligence™ System



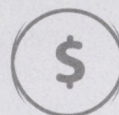
- **FIND & MEASURE** parcels and property with precision - anytime, anyplace.
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- **RETAIN & ACCESS** your properties in the cloud for easy reference and updating.



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Q&A WITH THE EXPERT WORK TRUCK



Q&A WITH GLENN ELLIS

Senior Vice President Customer Experience, Hino Trucks

1 What do landscape professionals want to know about Hino Trucks?

A: That first and foremost, we provide an Ownership Experience that is second to none. We provide an experience that allows our customers to, day in and day out, turn a profit. We consider the ownership experience every day, in the design of the vehicles themselves, but also the support we offer for each and every truck. Some good examples of this are our Hino INSIGHT platform and our HinoCare Program. Both of these total support platforms come standard on every Cabover truck Hino makes.

2 What is Hino INSIGHT?

A: Hino INSIGHT is a 3-part system: Telematics, Remote Diagnostics, and Case Management. Telematics I'm sure you know all about the standard benefits like fuel, idle time, PTO usage, and live vehicle tracking. What's unique about the Hino INSIGHT Telematics is our unique features like monitoring DEF level, DPF Status and preventative maintenance scheduling. These are the benefits of a standard, fully integrated solution that only Hino offers.

Integrating Remote Diagnostics and Case management into the solution is where the benefits start to stack up. If a fault code does occur, Hino has a team of people in our INSIGHT Diagnostic Center (IDC) working to be the intermediary between the Customer, Dealer, and OEM to get that truck to a service facility. It's this active process that can really save fleets time and money.

3 What kind of measurable benefits are fleets seeing with Hino INSIGHT?

A: Oh, there are a ton of benefits. The easiest to see is the up to 25% decrease in fuel

costs. We can attribute this to an up to 30% reduction in idle time, 10% drop in daily mileage and driver scorecard related items like; harsh acceleration, excess speeding events etc. We have also seen up to 20% increase in fleet utilization and 15% boost in workforce productivity. It's all of these incredible benefits that convinced us to make Hino INSIGHT standard.

4 What Hino truck models are landscapers buying and why?

A: Of course that depends on the application, but our 195DC is really popular with landscape companies. The 195DC has a GVW of 19,500

WE PROVIDE AN EXPERIENCE THAT ALLOWS OUR CUSTOMERS TO, DAY IN AND DAY OUT, TURN A PROFIT.

lbs. and is the double cab configuration of the 195 so there is room for bigger crews. The maneuverability of the 195 is second to none. Fleets love the visibility and all the creature comfort standard items like A/C, cruise control, power windows and door locks, overhead storage compartments, and 80 degree door openings.



HINO INSIGHT CONNECTED VEHICLE



TELEMATICS AND PREVENTIVE CARE ARE STANDARD: 2 MORE REASONS HINO IS THE RIGHT CHOICE FOR YOUR **LANDSCAPE** BUSINESS:

At Hino, we think it's about more than just delivering a class-leading truck... a lot more. That's why we support our product with a host of benefits and features that remain unmatched in the industry - from a 5 year, 200,000 mile warranty and 24/7 roadside service, to available preventive maintenance plans and Hino Insight, the industry's first fully connected vehicle platform with telematics, remote diagnostics and case management... standard.

We call it the **Ultimate Ownership Experience. POWERON**

Learn more at www.hino.com/landscape

1 year full Insight Telematics, 5 years Remote Diagnostics and Case Management and 2 years of preventive maintenance are standard on Hino Models 155, 155DC, 195, 195DC



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Q&A WITH THE EXPERT

SOIL HEALTH



Q&A WITH NICK DILORENZO

National Product Manager, Horizon Distributors

1 We all know what fertilizer is, but really, what is it?

A: Fertilizer supplies plants nutrients they need that aren't readily available from the soil. There are 16 essential elements that are responsible for plant growth. Some elements are supplied by Mother Nature: OXYGEN, CARBON and HYDROGEN. Fertilizer mostly consists of the elements (macronutrients) that provide a growth response: NITROGEN, PHOSPHORUS and POTASSIUM. Together these macronutrients provide the primary nutrition by plants required for growth. Then finally micronutrients are added to the product, which include the other 10 elements that are needed in lower amounts. These micronutrients help with internal processes that support plant growth and plant health.

2 What kinds of fertilizer are available?

A: There are many types of fertilizer out there to support plant growth:

- **Quick release nitrogen fertilizer** – quick green up requiring more applications each season (every 4-6 weeks).
- **Slow release or controlled release nitrogen**

16-0-8	24-0-12	32-0-16	
50% XCU® 0.5% Fe	50% XCU® 0.5% Fe	50% XCU® 0.5% Fe	Analysis
\$13.90 PER BAG	\$16.50 PER BAG	\$19.20 PER BAG	First Glance
Applying 1 lb. N: 6.3 lbs. / 1,000 sq. ft.	Applying 1 lb. N: 4.2 lbs. / 1,000 sq. ft.	Applying 1 lb. N: 3.1 lbs. / 1,000 sq. ft.	Application Rate
50 lb cover 8,000 sq. ft. \$1.74 / sq. ft.	50 lb cover 12,019 sq. ft. \$1.37 / sq. ft.	50 lb cover 16,000 sq. ft. \$1.20 / sq. ft.	Coverage
200 ACRES	200 ACRES	200 ACRES	
\$15,137.10	\$11,959.83	\$10,464.00	Final Cost
1,089 BAGS	725 BAGS	545 BAGS	

fertilizer – nitrogen is released over time, extending the feeding period to the plant (lasts 8 – 24 weeks, depending on product).

• **Organic fertilizer** – contributes to soil fertility by providing nutrient energy to the microbes in the soil.

While all these products do provide food to the plant, not all of them contribute to soil fertility.

3 How do I know which one to choose?

A: Start with what you are growing and how you want it to grow. Turf foods and ornamental plant foods usually differ in their ingredients and how they work. For ornamentals, it's not economical to be fertilizing

monthly so a balanced ratio (i.e., 15-15-15) with a slow release nitrogen is your best choice. For turfgrass, if you want a quick response, use a water soluble quick release nitrogen product. But with that you get consequences like fast growth, high yield, thatch buildup, root deterioration, and frequent applications. Instead I recommend using a slow release product that extends the feed and limits most of these liabilities. Not only is this type of nitrogen release healthier for the plant, it reduces labor costs through less applications. Finally, consider the release characteristics of the fertilizer. You don't want to use a product in the heat of the summer that releases with

heat and water or use an organic in the early spring when soils are still cold.

4 Any final thoughts?
A: It's so easy to get caught up in the cost per bag when selecting a fertilizer. But if you really want to maximize your profitability you need to be looking at cost per application or per season. Sure, that quick release may be a few dollars cheaper but you will have to apply it 2 – 3 times more often for the same results as the higher quality slow release fertilizer. Factor in labor costs, and you can see the better choice is often the slow release. Your local Horizon professional can help you make the right choice for your application.

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Working With Nature
*Can be applied
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There are 5 types of TurfGro Fertilizer to suit your situation. Look for the following label colors to point you toward the appropriate products to meet your needs:



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irrigation | outdoor living | landscape | equipment

Q&A WITH THE EXPERT

IRRIGATION



Q&A WITH DAN PUTHUFF

National Product Manager, Horizon Distributors

1 Last time, we talked about trends in the Irrigation space – specifically smart home automation and the effect of the labor shortage on business. Has anything changed?

A: These two trends continue to impact the industry – there is a strong need for contractors to find areas of efficiency and profitability to drive their businesses.

2 Other than “getting connected” to a site, what is another area of opportunity?

A: I see drainage as an excellent point of leverage for the residential contractor to expand their services. The #1 home improvement project that triggers a drainage system is a landscape project. While the contractor is on site, there is an excellent opportunity to talk to their customers about the need to protect their landscape and patio investment by installing a drainage system. 90% of the time, a property owner will take the advice of a contractor – they just need to start having the conversation.

3 Is Drainage profitable?

A: Yes, especially since it



I SEE DRAINAGE AS AN EXCELLENT POINT OF LEVERAGE FOR THE RESIDENTIAL CONTRACTOR TO EXPAND THEIR SERVICES.

allows a contractor the opportunity to increase their average invoice without a return trip – this ties into labor efficiency. The contractor is already trenching to install or renovate an irrigation system or digging to plant landscape material – adding a drainage system is an easy add-on.



4 How can a contractor get started installing drainage systems?

A: There are a lot of great tools in the market to help contractors with drainage diagnosis and solutions – one of our primary vendors, NDS, the leader in drainage solutions – provides an interactive Home Drainage Center tool on their website (ndspro.com) that solves the major drainage problems and also provides a parts list. They also have over 100 youtube videos on product, calculation, diagnosis and installation. Our knowledgeable sales force and store personnel can also help.

5 A contractor can find drainage products anywhere – why buy at Horizon?

A: The typical Big Box store only carries a few drainage SKUs. At Horizon Distributors, we recognize the importance of carrying a full line of drainage products to help our customers save time and get the job done quickly. By partnering with NDS on their Destination Drainage program, we have identified the top products to stock in each location. Stop by your local Horizon store and let us show you what we can do!

The products you need, when you need them...
all in one place.



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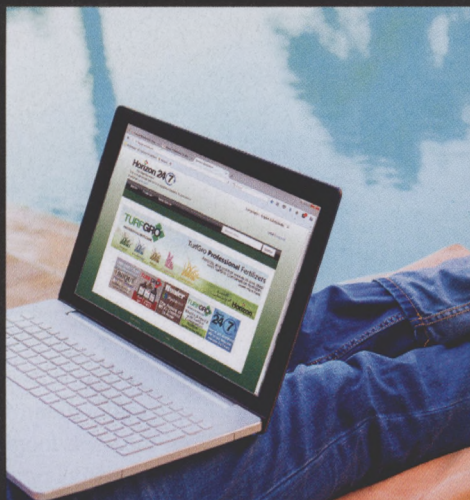
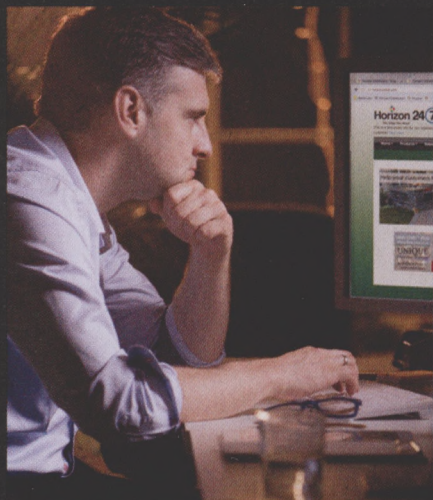
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Q&A WITH THE EXPERT ENGINES



Q&A WITH TROY SMITH

Manager, R&D Testing and EFI, Kawasaki

Kawasaki EFI engines precisely match power to load as you mow, for constant blade speed in tough conditions. Only Kawasaki EFI engines combine all the advantages of a fully integrated electronic governor (eGov), cutting-edge ECU control, and open-loop technology.

1 Why does Kawasaki opt for open-loop control rather than closed-loop control?

A: Kawasaki looked at all the variables to determine which technology would deliver the desired results. We always start by looking at the needs of lawn care professionals. In their demanding world, they need plenty of power and unfaltering dependability. Our open-loop system, paired with our electronic governor (eGov) and ECU achieves the results lawn care professionals want; power and reliability.

2 What is the difference between open-loop versus closed-loop?

A: A Kawasaki open-loop system uses a defined map to manage the air/fuel ratio on the front end of the fueling process. With an open-loop system, there is no O2 sensor. Kawasaki uses advanced engine control algorithms to maximize accuracy of fuel control.

A closed-loop system is more complicated in that it needs to add an O2 sensor to measure exhaust. It then

uses that reading to constantly adjust the air/fuel mixture to correct for any error in fuel control.

3 What about fuel efficiency?

A: Fuel efficiency is important to lawn care professionals. So, which system is more fuel efficient? This is a loaded question – literally. One source of efficiency loss is the

need for rich air/fuel ratios. Tested under identical conditions, the open-loop system exhibits air/fuel ratios similar to a closed-loop system. In fact, when compared at 50% load, air/fuel ratios between open and closed systems are almost identical in the engines tested. Therefore, closed loop or open loop alone does not equate to engine fuel efficiency. It's only one of the

OUR GOAL IS TO DELIVER OPTIMAL RESULTS UNDER THE MOST DEMANDING CONDITIONS.

many contributing factors.

4 What is the maintenance advantage for open-loop?

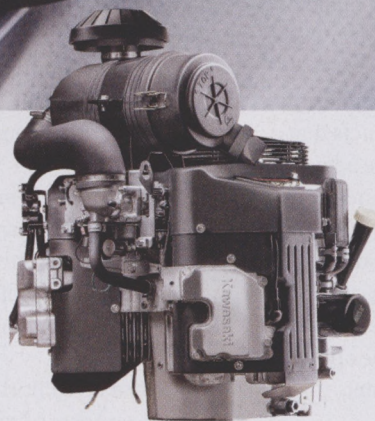
A: Our goal is to deliver optimal results under the most demanding conditions. The design of the open-loop system requires fewer parts so there's less to go wrong. A closed-loop system requires more parts and thus more maintenance.





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Q&A WITH THE EXPERT FERTILIZER



Q&A WITH JEREMY BIGLER

Landscape Channel Manager, LebanonTurf

It is hard enough gaining new business, don't jeopardize it because you are running short on man hours to get all of the work done. ProScape® combination products, from LebanonTurf, take time savings to the next level so you can be successful in maintaining all of your properties and continue to grow even with labor challenges.

1 Why should I use a combination product?

A: By applying a fertilizer and one or more pesticides in one application you are reducing labor costs compared to individual applications. This reduction in application time allows you do more with the time that you do have.

2 What exactly should I be looking for in a combination product?

A: First you want to make sure the pesticide(s) in the product match your application requirements. Timing is important for products that have more than one active ingredient, make sure you know when to apply. You also want to make sure that the fertilizer is high quality and matches the actives so you don't have to be applying fertilizer 4 weeks later.

3 My customers expect to see me every 6 weeks, how do these products help me?

A: Every visit does not

need to involve a fertilizer or pesticide application. Follow up visits could be used to spot treat troubled areas, apply a micro nutrient product or it could be time used for an add-on tree and shrub program.

4 What specialty combination products are available today?

A: • ProScape Pre and Post Emergent + Fertilizer – for pre and post emergent weed control.

• ProScape Acelepryn and Dimension + Fertilizer – for insect and pre emergent weed control.

• ProScape Starter Fertilizer with Mesotrione – a starter fertilizer with pre emergent weed control to use while seeding cool season grasses.

5 Where can I find more information about these products?

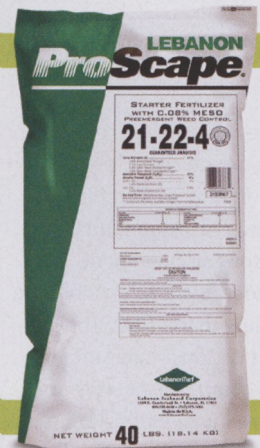
A: You can find more information at www.lebanonturf.com/combination or call us at 1-800-233-0628

ProScape®



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FERTILIZING WITH WEED CONTROL



AT THE SAME TIME IS BETTER.

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Do more in less time with ProScape Starter Fertilizer with Mesotrione. Apply both fertilizer and weed control that is effective when establishing new turf. Your grass gets off to a great start, freeing up time for other jobs and customers. For more information, visit LebanonTurf.com or call **1-800-233-0628**.



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Q&A WITH THE EXPERT

HIGH RESOLUTION AERIAL IMAGING



Q&A WITH TIM FRANK

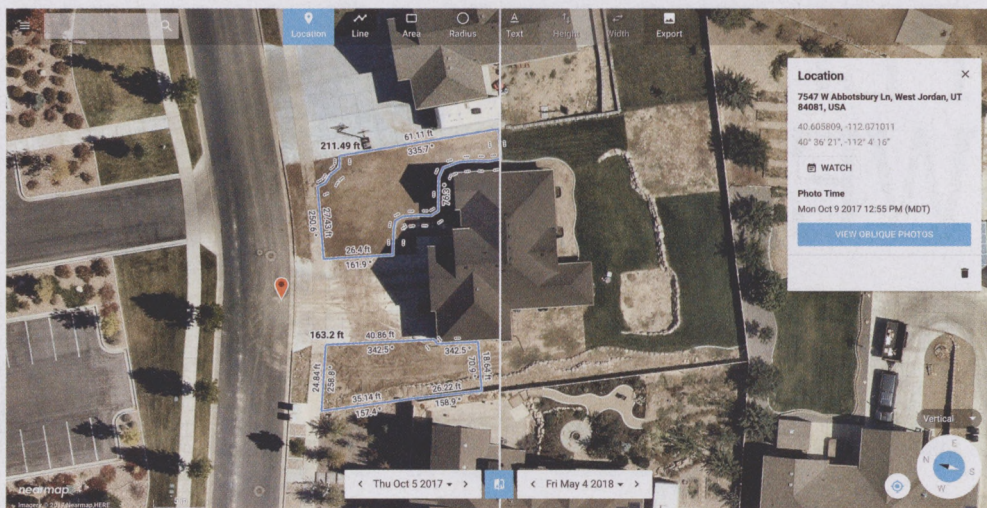
Vice President of Global Growth Marketing, Nearmap

1 How do your products or services save landscape or lawn care pros time?

A: Lawn care and landscaping professionals spend considerable amounts of time traveling to job sites. They do this at various stages of business – from prospecting and canvassing neighborhoods, to estimating and quoting, installation, service and on-going maintenance. Nearmap's high-resolution aerial maps provide crystal-clear images of job sites from either top down or oblique view angles, so landscapers can target new business, create estimates, and bid accurately and quickly all from the office. Less time on-site means more time finding new business.

2 How do your products or service save landscape or lawn care pros labor?

A: With Nearmap's MapBrowser, landscapers can search and view HD aerial maps for addresses or areas of interest on-demand from a standard web browser. However, in contrast to free satellite maps, Nearmap's imagery is updated often and several times sharper, allowing you to inspect details about the site without visiting it in



person. More importantly, MapBrowser includes powerful tools that allow users to make precise measurements, as well as annotate, directly on top of the imagery.

3 How do your products or services save on materials or fuel?

A: By using Nearmap's MapBrowser, landscape professionals can accurately quote for the proper amount of materials and be able to determine any objects that may add time or effort. This can all be done from the comfort of your office – saving on fuel and travel time to jobsites. For example, if an average field worker earns \$14/hour and makes four site visits a day

with vehicle running costs of \$0.56 per mile, in a year's time this would equal almost 1,000 site visits and close to \$15,000 in expenses. If you were to trim off a third of those in-person site visits and replace them with virtual site visits using Nearmap's high-res imagery in MapBrowser, you will have saved around \$7,000. It adds up very quickly.

4 How do your products or services help generate additional revenue?

A: Using Nearmap, landscapers can scan entire neighborhoods to identify new business opportunities in minutes. All locations captured by Nearmap are geo-indexed, meaning users can

drop a pin and quickly pull-up address details, coordinates, and even the time and date the image was captured. A landscaper can then target those addresses directly and provide up-to-date imagery of prospect properties for clear and concise quoting.

5 In what other ways do your products or services make companies profitable?

A: When you need validation that your services have improved a landscape, or proof that a problem with the lawn existed prior. Nearmap historical imagery can be compared to current aerial maps to prove your point, retain customers or win new business.

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Q&A WITH THE EXPERT

SPREADER/SPRAYER



Q&A WITH TOM JESSEN

President, PermaGreen

1 Why are more companies using ride-on spreader/sprayers?

A: Ride-on spreader/sprayers can help you maximize production, apply more accurately, cut labor costs, and retain good employees. People sometimes make the mistake of thinking that spreader/sprayers are only good for big properties. But with the right machine, you should be able to treat accounts of any size, every day, from the very smallest to the very biggest. That's how a spreader/sprayer can deliver maximum efficiency, maximum profits and offer a fast return on your investment.

2 How do spreader/sprayers help reduce labor costs and issues?

A: A good rule of thumb is: One person with a ride-on spreader/sprayer can do the work of two or more people walking twice over a lawn (first to spread, then to spray). This time savings is crucial for a one-person operation. Companies with multiple technicians can retain their best employees by providing better working conditions and a more enjoyable, long-term career.

3 Can a spreader/sprayer deliver more accurate applications and quality results?

A: Absolutely. A good spreader/sprayer should address several quality-robbing variables, including: Human error, proper calibration, ground speed, product distribution and overlap of the spread and spray patterns. First and foremost, ride-on spreader/sprayers reduce error-causing fatigue. The ease and extent to which they address the other variables differs from brand to brand. Keep in mind that the better these variables are controlled, the less chance there will be for operator error and service calls.

4 Does a spreader/sprayer make financial sense?

A: For startups and single-person operations, it can be your best investment, making you instantly competitive, especially when it comes to pricing and quality of service. For businesses with multiple technicians, it's a no brainer; the right spreader/sprayer will dramatically cut your overhead and make you more competitive. Furthermore, spreader/sprayers can offer a business the ability,



THE RIGHT SPREADER/SPRAYER WILL DRAMATICALLY CUT YOUR OVERHEAD AND MAKE YOU MORE COMPETITIVE

confidence and time to grow their operation.

5 How do I know which spreader/sprayer is right for me?

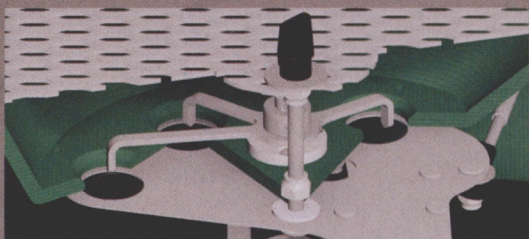
A: If you want to treat a mix of residential, commercial and sports fields, you need an all-around machine that has the size, speed, maneuverability, and spread/spray trimming ability to

excel on both small and large properties. If you want to specialize in sports turf with wide-open areas with no trimming, then a larger-capacity machine might be good for you. In any case, it is wise to choose the spreader/sprayer that both makes you money every day and makes it easier for you or your employee to deliver quality applications, every time.

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Q&A WITH THE EXPERT

EDGING



Q&A WITH DANIEL MARTIN

Director of Marketing, Permaloc Corporation

1 Should I be using a different edging for straight runs as opposed to curved lines?

A: We've all been there. Trying our best to make edging that is running parallel to a structure look straight. No matter how hard we try, the waves between each staking point remain painfully obvious. The human eye is designed to pick up those anomalies.

That's why when doing straight lines with edging, it is important to use an edging that was created for that. Not only will the result look much better to those that will see it over time, but you will save yourself a great deal of time during the install. And in this business, time is money!

Edgings designed for straight lines typically have a feature built in that allows them to remain perfectly rigid, like a small "foot" on the bottom. They should still have built-in staking to assure that it remains in place and does not shift during the lifetime of the project.

2 How do I install a paver edging for permeable pavers when I can't drive a spike in?

A: As permeable pavers become increasingly popular, in



large part due to governmental regulations on stormwater management, many contractors are curious about how the installation steps vary from traditional installation over a compacted base.

With non-permeable applications, the edging is simply spiked into the compacted base using a spiral steel spike.

This provides plenty of holding power to keep the edging in place. However, permeable pavers require an open-graded base to allow the water to move through. This loose stone will not provide any "bite" for the spike to hold the edging in place.

A new system for holding edging in place on a

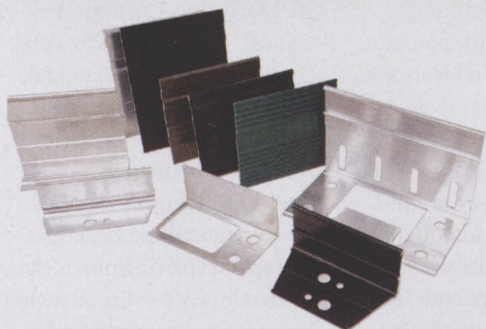
permeable base involves attaching the edging to a biaxial geogrid textile embedded between two layers of stone. The edging is attached using a capture plate and heavy-duty screws to assure that it will maintain holding power under the heaviest of vehicular loads.

3 What is the difference between residential edging and commercial edging?

A: The primary difference in edging grades is wall thickness. A thicker wall provides more vertical strength, allowing heavier foot traffic and larger maintenance equipment to traverse the edging.

It is important to match the thickness and depth of the edging with the circumstances associated with your installation. This checklist can include foot traffic, maintenance requirements, adjacent materials, soil type, etc.

It is important to note that landscape edging uses nominal thicknesses (similar to lumber), and not all edging companies provide the same wall thicknesses within the same nominal size. So be sure to do your research to make sure you are truly getting what you are paying for!



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SUSTAINABLE EDGING SOLUTIONS

Q&A WITH THE EXPERT

MARKETING



Q&A WITH LINDA THOMAS

Marketing Director, Real Green Systems

Automated marketing isn't just for gaining new business. It helps retain customers, increase their value and win back cancels. An automated marketing campaign generates emails and letters behind the scenes, with little to no manual intervention, allowing your staff more time to concentrate on providing a superior customer experience and you more time to grow your business.

1 Will automated marketing help estimate acceptance?

A: Certainly. People won't always accept estimates the first time. Some never bother responding. While a variety of reasons exist for no response or rejection, nurturing these leads with a follow-up marketing campaign provides sales teams opportunities to overcome objections, gain positive responses and win sales. Automated campaigns allow you to set up digital and print drip communications and can boost estimate acceptance by more than 8%.

2 Can automated marketing improve retention?

A: Yes! Consistent communication is a retention cornerstone.

After-sale marketing is critical and becomes a more intensive education. Why do customers need to continue service? What additional services complement the initial sale? Are there any new conditions found on the property and if so, what services do you offer to remedy them? Your campaigns need to answer these questions on a regular basis.

After-sale marketing also includes essential customer care messages such as when you'll be on their property, reminders to open gates or ensure Fido, the kids and their toys are safely inside during service. Lawn care tips specific to each customer, payment reminders or a heads-up their on-file credit card is about to expire are also expected and appreciated. These automated communications may seem routine, but to your customers they indicate you care about them and understand them. They'll feel you've taken the time to know them and be more inclined to stay loyal, even if a discounted competitor pops up.

3 What's an easy way to increase revenue?

A: Upsells. Upselling services to existing customers through opt-in email, letter and

postcard campaigns increase customer value and your bottom line, without increasing territory or overrunning marketing budgets. So, routes stay tight; field staff generates more revenue per stop and marketing ROI increases. You save time, fuel and vehicle wear with minimal spend. They are a simple and effective way to increase sales and keep your marketing budget in check. Upsells make sense for any service-based business. You have all your customer's data. You know which services they currently have and which additional services would benefit them going forward.

4 Do I need to keep current customers engaged?

A: Indeed. Maintaining engagement helps maintain your company's relevancy in customers' busy lives. Attention spans are shrinking, and the worst thing that can happen is losing customers because they've forgotten why they're paying you. A short digital newsletter in your automated marketing strategy helps keep customers engaged, allows you to reach them on their mobile devices and continue educating them

about your company, products and services. Further, personalize their experience with news and offers specific to them, especially why your service is vital, repeatedly reminding them of your company's value.

Start an automated customer appreciation campaign utilizing automated marketing. Consider sending a "thank you" email or postcard to your customers on service anniversary dates offering them a free or discounted service. Showing customers in a tangible way that their business is appreciated helps nurture customer loyalty and can result in them referring others to your business.


5 How can I win back canceled customers?


A: Marketing. Customers cancel for numerous reasons. Targeting automated digital and print marketing campaigns toward cancels allows your sales team to reconnect and provides opportunities to win them back. Offering special pricing provides added incentive. Because they were recently your customers, open rates are higher. Actual win-backs can exceed 7%, with minimal effort and expenditure.

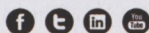
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Q&A WITH THE EXPERT FRANCHISES



Q&A WITH BEN & STEPHANIE SCHOOT

Co-owners, The Grounds Guys of Myrtle Beach

1 What was business like for you before you became a Grounds Guy, how has it changed?

A: We had our landscape company for seven years before we reached out to The Grounds Guys. *I wanted a business, not a job.* However, the reality was that I left my job and went to another. We were doing okay, we had four or five guys working on two trucks, but there was no structure, no financial management. It was difficult to win commercial and HOA accounts as an independent. *We were always up against national brands, and most the time it was like hitting a brick wall, getting a hard "no" before we were even in the door.*

Prior to The Grounds Guys, I was on a mower by 7:30 every day, coming home dirty and missing events with my family. Often, I would have to shut down the crews early so I could run kids around or do errands for the business or the family. Often, I wouldn't take any salary from the business, we would just take a draw when we had a bill to pay.

It came to a point where we had to decide if we were going to continue with our business and look for a franchise, or

face the alternative; get out of business and get another job. That's when we started looking at The Grounds Guys.

Now, my wife, Stephanie is in our business. We are both able to pay ourselves a salary for the work we do in the business, and I work in the office and am home by dinner every day. I wore a white polo to work the other day, a white polo. I never could have done that before. *I now have the quality of life and time flexibility aspect that I wanted from business ownership in the first place.*

2 Why did you convert your business you worked for into a franchise?

A: We got that question a lot, until we started growing like crazy, no one asks us that anymore. Honestly though, we asked ourselves that question before we got started. What made the decision for us was when we traveled to the Waco Home Office and met the team and learned the system. *Before we made it back home, we were all in.* It was a big risk, but the good thing about that was that we were ready to take advantage of the systems to the fullest.

Also, having a national brand behind me made me

feel so much more confident going into talk to big commercial clients. In the first six months we were The Grounds Guys, we landed a national builder account that we still service today.

And having to turn in our monthly financials to Home Office keeps us accountable. We watch our labor percent, we watch our materials like we never did before. I never knew my profit margins on services or if I was over for man hours on a job. We talk constantly about our numbers and we focus on our budget and sticking to it every month.

3 What have you found to be the most beneficial about being a part of a franchise system?

A: We feel that networking with the other owners is the most incredible part of what we got when we joined The Grounds Guys. *Our friends and family can't fully understand what we do, and they don't necessarily get our problems within our business. But our fellow Grounds Guys owners completely understand everything we are going through.* There is always someone to talk to if you need help, you're never alone. Fellow owners have

become our biggest cheerleaders. Attending Reunion (our national conference) and meeting everyone and seeing the Top Guns get called up on stage is so motivating. Everyone is willing to talk with you and help you make your business better. They even invite us to come visit their locations to learn how they do it. What other business can you think of where you can call someone that has the exact model and goals as you and ask questions that will help to better your operation.

4 Any advice to Independent Owners?

A: To independent owners I would say, what are you missing? What do you need in your business? *What hats should you take off to help you meet your goals? Franchising isn't for everyone, but if you struggle with systems or accountability or finance management or goal setting, it might be a solution that you look into.* You still have to go out and do the work. You still have to build the relationships and get it done. If you don't want to franchise, just find the right people to help you somewhere. Everyone who runs a business needs support and help sometimes.



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Q&A WITH THE EXPERT

CONSUMER FINANCING/BUSINESS GROWTH



Q&A WITH JOSH ROBINSON

Design and Sales Manager, Todd's Services Inc.

1 What types of financing programs do you offer?

A: We began offering financing about 15 years ago. It was starting to trend at the time in other sectors, but not so much in landscaping. We partnered with a couple of lenders and got started.

We offer financing to residential customers which make up 90 percent of our business. The two plans that are most often used by our sales team are the 12-month, deferred interest; and then the term financing, which is 6.9 percent APR for 50 months.

There are two types of customers that tend to use financing. One that just wants to take advantage of a deferred interest period. Then there's another type of customer who does not have the funds at hand. We do talk about how they're going to pay for the project early on.

Before the crash, it was a higher percentage, but today about 10 percent of our customers take advantage of financing. That number is growing again. It seems to be

trending back to where people are borrowing again. They're being more careful now, but they are borrowing and taking advantage of financing options again.

2 Has offering financing helped you sell bigger contracts?

A: Our average project is probably somewhere between \$15,000 and \$20,000. Financing allows for second or third phases to be done now.

Sometimes a person only has the cash on hand to do one phase. For example if it's a new home and maybe they can afford the lawn and sprinkler system out of pocket (phase one), but they really would like to have their landscaping (phase two) done at the same time, too. Our sales team will ask them if they can put the value of the lawn and sprinkler system down now, and then we will go ahead and finance the landscaping over a period of 50 months.

Not only does this allow phases to be done sooner, but

it's a financial advantage for the customer because they don't have to pay for us to come back to their property, which can increase the price since there are associated costs with bringing our team back on site.

3 What other advantages does financing provide?

A: It's an advantage over a lot of the competition that doesn't offer it. Sometimes people will hire us because we offer financing. We do get a lot of calls simply because we have the words "financing available" on our website and in our advertisements.

In addition, sometimes customers are able to do the project sooner. It's very common for a customer to be waiting on a chunk of money, such as an end of the year bonus or holiday bonus. It allows them to do that project in May or June and enjoy their property during the warm season, rather than waiting until they get that money in December.

4 Have financing options helped increase overall sales?

A: We get some people that contact our company strictly because we offer financing. That obviously helps increase business. Also, because it allows people to do second or third phases of a project, that makes what might have been a \$30,000 job become a \$50,000 or \$60,000 job for us. It increases the size of the project the customer will be able to have done.

It also allows us to add to our customer base people who are on a weekly or monthly budget. They're able to spread the job out in monthly payments, so it gets us work that we might not have otherwise secured. Some people are monthly budget people, and they can look at that \$400 per month payment and say, 'Okay, I can make that work. I'm going to do this.' That's a customer that we're able to get with financing where we otherwise would not have had that customer's business.

This is just another way to capture a section of buyers. If you don't have financing as one of your tools in your sales tactics, you're going to miss out on customers.

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*Lawn & Landscape Smart Finance Survey, Dec. 2018.

MONEY FROM WITHIN

Starting an internal scholarship program can promote company culture and doesn't need to be complicated. **By Jimmy Miller**

AS JAMES MARTIN ASSOCIATES – with locations in Chicago and Boulder – celebrated 40 years of business in 2017, owner James Martin wondered if there was a way to thank his employees differently than the company had done in the past.

So, two years ago, the company opted to start a scholarship for employees' children, helping them offset the cost of college tuition. Martin says starting this scholarship has already become a staple at his business, and it's helped improve his company culture.

"All of the sudden, you're seeing all the

outstanding young people that you had no idea are part of what I'll call the extended company family," Martin says.

Martin says there are plenty of ways to handle setting up an employee scholarship, but here's what they did.

ESTABLISH CRITERIA. Applicants need to know who's eligible, what factors will be considered in decision-making and how much money is at stake.

Martin says he told employees up front how much the scholarships will be worth and

how many candidates will be selected. Communicate the criteria in English and Spanish if need be, or clarify the requirements in any other language that might be necessary for your employees.

James Martin Associates also aimed to add some level of prestige to the scholarship by offering a big presentation check, taking a picture and sending a press release out with the photo to local media companies and the student's high school.

TAKE PRECAUTIONARY STEPS. Martin says that anybody establishing a scholarship, whether it's internal or external, should make sure they research how it would affect their taxes.

Martin also says setting up a committee – even if it's just two or three extra employees – to help make the final decision could eliminate the possibility of bias. He says getting letters of recommendation to help factor into the decision-making process helps keep it objective as well.

Martin recommends taking employees through the process and show how exceptional the other candidates were, rather than communicate why their son or daughter didn't win.

Visit bit.ly/martinscholarships for the full version of this article with more details and tips from Martin. **L&L**





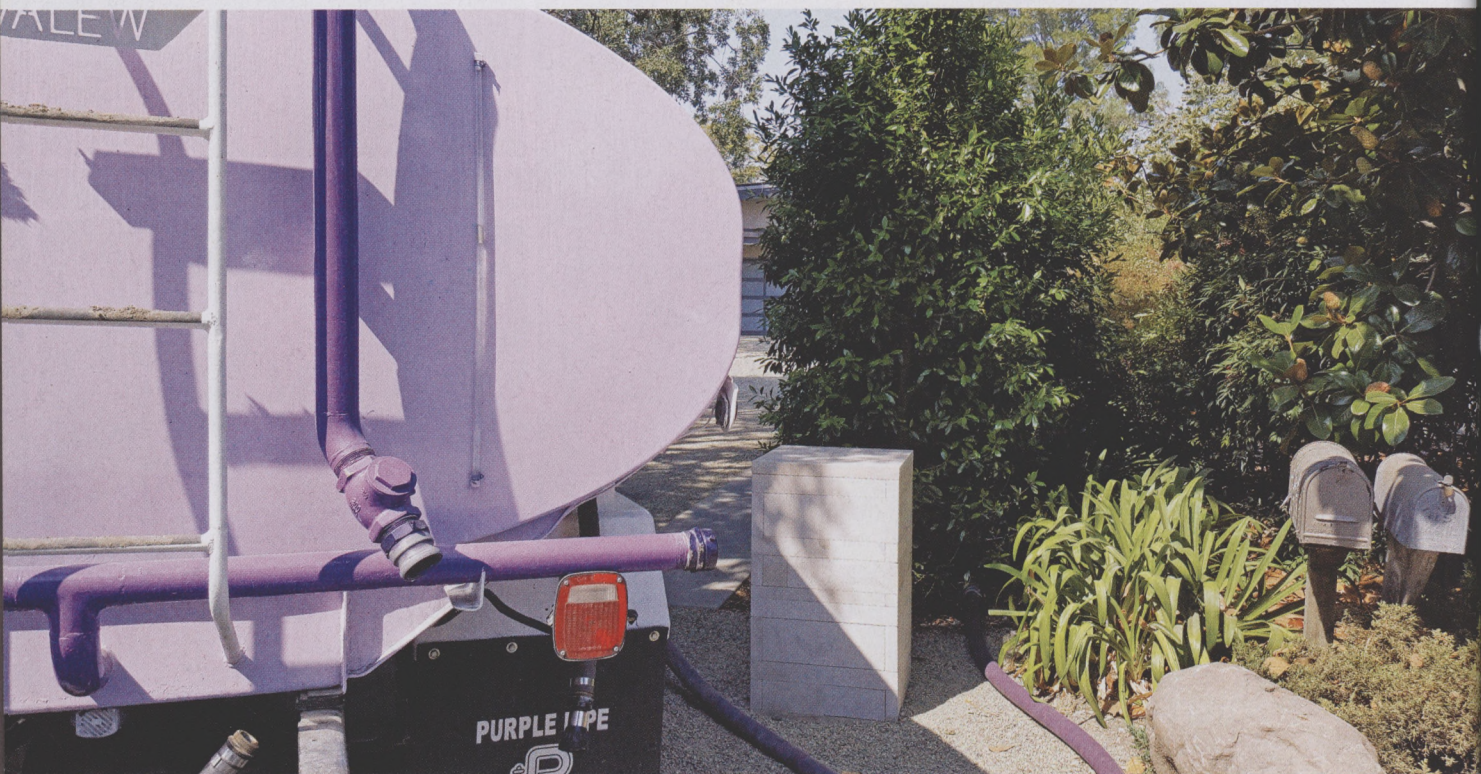
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Please email submissions or any questions to Editor Brian Horn at bhorn@gie.net.



Palo Alto's The Purple Pipe Company uses reclaimed water systems for irrigation.

By Robin Roenker

In 2015, during one of Palo Alto's frequent droughts, Joseph Rahn launched The Purple Pipe Company to offer residents a way to irrigate their lawns and landscapes using reclaimed water.

Named after the purple pipes installed by municipalities throughout southern California to deliver reclaimed, treated, non-potable water from waste water treatment facilities to high-usage irrigation sites – including city parks, golf courses and business/tech centers – The Purple Pipe Company aims to expand access to reclaimed water to individual homeowners as well.

It currently serves a limited area, including Palo Alto and portions of the surrounding Bay Area peninsula.

"We launched in order to replace the drinking water that's used on landscapes with non-potable water," says Rahn, whose company now includes three employees and three, 2,000-gallon irrigation trucks. "Our idea was to essentially extend the pipeline with our water trucks and go the final mile to reach consumers who otherwise would not be hit by this pipeline."

A typical Palo Alto family of four might use about five CCFs (Centum Cubic Feet), or around 3,890 gallons, of water per month for indoor use, but up to 20-40 CCFs when outdoor irrigation is added into the equation during the height of dry season, Rahn says.

"The majority of the water used over the course of the year is for landscaping. And we could replace a majority of this

with non-potable water," he says. "We want to help people use the right type of water for the right use."

CUSTOMIZED SERVICE OPTIONS.

Rahn's company currently offers several, stratified service options for customers interested in using reclaimed or recycled water. The Purple Pipe Company's water is sourced from both waste water treatment facilities as well as from groundwater sources. But all of it is pre-filtered and pre-treated so that it's safe to use on plants.

For entry-level or occasional customers – typically homeowners who simply want to keep their lawns and landscape alive and looking healthy during periods when drought restrictions prohibit or limit the use of mu-

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IRRIGATION

NAVIGATING THE PERMITTING

and registration processes required to use reclaimed water can be taxing.

municipal water for irrigation – The Purple Pipe Company can truck in water and irrigate the lawn using large, firetruck-style hoses.

The process works, but it can be time-intensive for Rahn's staff and potentially damaging to the landscape. "We might have to roll out 200 feet of fire hose to get to the backyard and then roll it up again. It makes a big muddy mess and can potentially trample plants," he explained.

For clients wanting more frequent service, Rahn suggests one of two upgraded delivery mechanisms: either an integrated pipe system installed on the property, which in effect is ready to receive the water from the irrigation trucks without the use of large bulky hoses; or a fully automated, integrated water system utilizing an on-site cistern that collects and reuses a mix of rainwater, tanked-in reclaimed water from The Purple Pipe Company and, during dry spells, a baseline amount of municipal water when needed.

For environmentally conscious customers who are committed to adopting reclaimed water for their lawncare, Rahn believes the integrated water system is the natural choice. "I think that's really the only way to replace the majority of your (lawn use) water with reclaimed water," he says. "It would be the most expensive up front, but it would reduce the per-gallon cost of service in the long run."

THE CHALLENGES OF A NEW NICHE. The problem is, navigating the permitting and registration processes required to use reclaimed water can be taxing – so much so that Rahn feels it's a "massive barrier to entry" for many would-be service providers.

Rahn must stay abreast of ever-changing city, county, and state water usage restrictions and regulations as well as applicable plumbing codes and specific permitting procedures for reclaimed water use – which are typically specific to each municipality and, sometimes even, to each individual water treatment facility where the water is being sourced.

Rahn's other biggest challenge is riding the natural ebbs and flows in demand for his services, based on how much – or little – rain is currently falling on Southern California.

"In Palo Alto, it rains generally from November through April or so," he says. "So, our business is currently kind of revolving around just the six or seven dry months of the year."

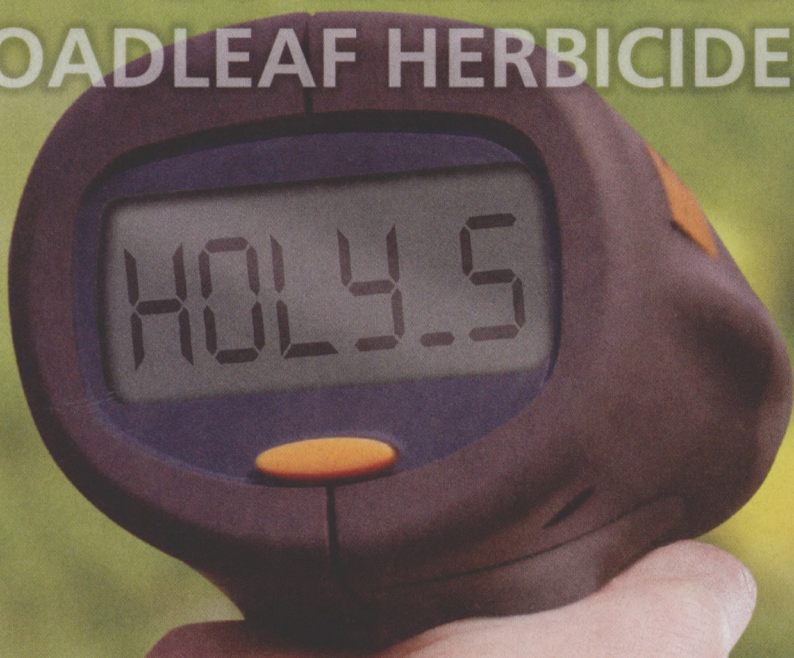
Still, with increased efficiencies as his firm grows, Rahn hopes to eventually be able to provide irrigation services using reclaimed water at a price point that's roughly equivalent to the cost of using municipal water from the tap. He explains to clients that while the reclaimed water is sourced free from water treatment facilities, his service charge accounts for transit and labor costs involved in delivery.

"Municipal water costs around a penny a gallon in Palo Alto on average," Rahn says. "We are still working to bring our costs down. We hope with economies of scale, we may be able to get within striking distance of that. Our hope is to get to the point where people want to do the right thing and are willing to pay a little bit more to be able to use the right type of water for the right job." **L&L**

The author is a freelance writer based in Kentucky.

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get grounded

Mulch and groundcovers are staples in many landscapes.
Here's what's trending this year.

By Lauren Rathmell

In central North Carolina,

Jim Keen, lead designer with New Garden Landscaping and Nursery, says colored mulch isn't increasing in popularity. He's not the biggest fan of it either: It tends to bleed off and leach into other plants.

"We talked to our clients about (colored mulch) because that's not going to break down and it actually may leech things into the (earth)," Keen says. "And as plant lovers, we do everything we can to keep those babies all right."

Keen says the company has been getting more requests for natural-looking mulch to balance aesthetic and function. "It's our job as designers to look at the area we're designing and then speak with the client about the preferred material to use," he says. New Garden runs about five or six installation crews and is a maintenance and design/build company.

BARE NECESSITY. Keen says mulch in his area has been particularly beneficial. His region saw long and excessive rainfall, and mulch in the landscaping beds helped to keep things in place. "There's definitely a need for (mulch) with the plant for moisture as well as retention and soil control," he says. "It tends not to wash out quite as bad as some of the other covers."

The natural mulch doesn't lend itself to washout as much, Keen says. It will eventually break down and turn into soil anyway.

Underneath the mulch, some contractors will lay a fabric down. Keen says he prefers to go without this because the natural mulch is meant to return to the soil. He says it still allows some room for weeds to germinate.

"That's going to give a false sense of security because the weed seed can still germinate on top of (the lining), he says.

As a designer, Keen prefers to use mini nuggets of mulch on his clients' properties. He says they create a more defined and detailed look. "It creates a very manicured look. I think it really pops in a landscape with the nice greenery."

The mulch is not only aesthetically practical, it's also a relatively easy install. "It's easy to haul and easy to distribute," he says. "We use typically bag material. It's usually the shredded hardwood mulch and it's easy for our crews to handle."

ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS. At Ahlgren Landscaping in Plainville, Connecticut, owner Chris Ahlgren says 60 to 70 percent of the groundcover they do is still mulch. The full-service maintenance and design/build company employs 10 full-time workers.

"I think mulch is still a constant. I don't really see it fading away, at least in our area," he says. However, Ahlgren has been finding more and more jobs that have warranted the use of stone ground cover instead of mulch.

It's a different look and it comes at a different price, but stone is moving its way from commercial landscapes into residential yards.

Mulch is still about 20 to 30 percent the cost of stone, but Ahlgren has noticed that more customers are willing to pay for the higher quality.

In his service area, Ahlgren says there's been a lot of new construction. Home owners are looking for something with less upkeep, and stone ground cover is able to provide that option.

"It saves on maintenance for them," he says. "With the stone, you aren't paying for that mulch every year. You kind of put it in and set it and forget it and it looks good year after year." Larger stone sizes can be even more practical as a low-maintenance option, Ahlgren says. "Smaller three-quarter inch stone gets moved around more with the leaf blowers."

The stone can even prevent weeds from sprouting in the flower beds because of the weed preventing fabric laid beneath it. Ahlgren says he recommends stone over mulch in cases where the property might be susceptible for erosion issues since the material is less likely to move.

He also opts for stone in areas that may have a history of certain pest issues. "Some from the areas that we service, there may be a big issues with termites or carpenter ants and things like that. Going with a stone, it helps keep those type of pests away," he says. "And you're not adding more insects to that area." **L&L**

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RISING fast

When every other college program seems to be shrinking, Tri-C in Cleveland is growing.

By Jimmy Miller

Last January, Associate Professor Jim Funai and Program Manager Lori Zatroch of Cuyahoga Community College found their horticulture program's future stationed in the middle of Wisconsin.

No, they weren't planning on relocating the two-year university from its home in Cleveland; instead, they visited Mid-State Technical College for a tour. They wanted to see a school that had already built a facility similar to what Tri-C hoped to create in Ohio. Funai says the Mid-State officials offered plenty of advice, and over

the course of several days, he and Zatroch took detailed notes on what things they'd like to bring to their campus.

Back home, Tri-C has been changing the perception about their school and careers in horticulture in general. When Funai arrived in 2009 after years working in the industry, he admitted that he didn't know Tri-C existed. The program struggled to get more than three students in a class, but now they've grown so rapidly that they're adding a new facility and new classes. The school is adding to a sterling reputation built upon vigorous, hands-on classwork that's helped plenty of students secure great jobs right after graduation.

"We're not just going to talk about it," Funai says. "Here, we're going to do it. If they can go into an employer and say they know how, that's going to be pretty huge."

But Tri-C is an anomaly. Most schools across the country are shrinking, not expanding, let alone gutting their classrooms to add updated technologies and improved training facilities. Through a focus on aggressive recruiting and a

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series of helpful grants, Tri-C is bucking the downward trend in horticulture education.

GOOD AS NEW. Just a few months prior to that Wisconsin visit, Cuyahoga County voters passed a 25-year, 0.5 mill-bond that was intended to improve and repair facilities across all Tri-C campuses. Funai says that apparently, he and Zatroch had proved vocal enough about how much the horticulture program needed a new facility that Tri-C prioritized giving them one.

The school has since broken ground on its Plant Science and Landscape Technology Learning Barn, which is going to be a 2,200-square-foot workspace that's prominently placed on a part of Tri-C's Eastern Campus. Right in the center of the facility will be a rustic timber pole used to practice

climbing and rigging in arboriculture classes.

Right now, Funai says half of the Tri-C curriculum incorporates hands-on exercise, but there are severe limitations. He says the students will often practice hardscaping in a parking lot and need to pack up at the end of class, or they'll do assignments in the freezing cold and a foot of snow. With the new facility, the curriculum will ease into far more hands-on exercise.

"This facility changes everything we do for hands-on," Funai says. "Now, you're dodging the weather and planning for that. It's been a logistical nightmare. We pulled it off, there's good lessons learned – it's not always the lessons I wanted to have them learn – there's just so much out of your control. This building will bring back into control the lessons we need to learn for that particular day."

Just because you get dirty doesn't mean you're dumb."

JIM FUNAI, Tri-C associate professor

SPREADING THE WORD. Former student McKenna Rowles, who graduated last year and has since gone on to become an irrigation crew field manager, says her background knowledge from her time at Tri-C has already become invaluable. She says she one of several alumni who proudly talk about their two-year program, even when comparing college experiences with folks who graduated from a more prominent four-year university.

"I have the background of so many things," Rowles says. "The fact that I know it is what put me ahead, and that is all thanks to Tri-C. You can't know enough."

What Funai, Zatroch and others say about the program outside classroom doors is another element to Tri-C's resurgence. They'll go to local high schools to proactively recruit instead of waiting for interested students to

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Associate professor Jim Funai arrived on campus in 2009.



Tri-C takes pride in its national success at the National Collegiate Landscape Competition.

come to them. Funai says many students don't even know there are job opportunities in horticulture, nor do they acknowledge that they can go to a two-year school instead of a four-year university to earn their degrees.

Without seeking those kids out, they may never recognize their interest in horticulture could become a lucrative career.

"I just don't know if people are spending enough time with those kids helping them

to understand there's a pretty sweet career (in landscaping)," Funai says. "If no one's telling them, they're not going to stick around. Turns out you can actually make a living doing this. Who knew?"

Funai says he'll often bring his own students to career fairs or visits so that the high school students can chat with somebody closer to them in age. He also says he hosts open classes from time to time, inviting in-

terested students to spend the day observing what Tri-C does with their students.

During the more formal pitches, however, Funai informs students that there's nothing wrong with getting a degree in horticulture. He brings attention to the industry's worst stigma and debunks it, which is something he says other school's recruiters don't often do.

"A lot of times we almost apologize for what we do," Funai says. "Like, well, you know, I'm just a landscape contractor. Quit apologizing. I'm a professional, I work with my hands and I'm outside. I get dirty. I'm also really smart, and I love it. So, how do you like that? We don't have to apologize for this. Take great pride in what you're doing because it's an honorable thing what you're doing. Just because you get dirty doesn't mean you're dumb."

MONEY TALKS. Ultimately, the passed levy wasn't the only money Tri-C needed to expand its horticulture program and nearly double its enrollment numbers. Funai has received a plethora of grants that've helped boost their school, and he says they're easier to apply for than most people are willing to admit. Sure, it takes effort, but the benefits to their program have been sizable.

These grants allowed for more diversity in the types of classes Tri-C offered, which helps students specify what they want to get into once they graduate.

For instance, Tri-C picked up a grant named after former Ohio state senator Carl Perkins, which helped them buy an air spade to help analyze tree health, as well as a wood chipper to teach students safety. Other grants helped them buy drones to show students defects in trees that they should avoid before they climb them.

Just recently, STIHL and the Tree Care Industry Association teamed up and selected Tri-C as one of five schools out of roughly 60 to earn a voucher for \$5,000 in STIHL equipment. The equipment is specifically designed for smaller women who might otherwise feel discouraged from arboriculture because many tools are noticeably heavier.

"I swear, I almost cried when I heard that

one,” Funai says. “It’s not going to buy you a ton of stuff, but holy crap. That’s going to update what we have for training big time. That was \$5,000 we were never going to have to spend.”

THE NATIONAL STAGE. When Rowles graduated from Tri-C last May, she applied to many open landscaping jobs where the employers already knew her. She ultimately landed at Ruppert Landscape in Raleigh, North Carolina – a gig she says she might not have landed without the National Collegiate Landscape Competition.

The annual contest pits students against each other in various categories like hardscape installation, plant problem diagnosis and compact excavator operation.

Tri-C finished fourth overall last year, and Rowles finished third out of more than 700 competitors across the contest. She was the

highest finisher by somebody who attended a two-year school.

Companies that attended NCLC took notice, which is coincidental because Rowles was initially hesitant to even join the NCLC team.

It was only at the urging of Funai and her classmates that she finally decided to participate, and once she got hooked, she and her peers often eagerly practiced. They came in on weekends to work outside, even over the winter, but the work pays off so long as students network at the competition.

“I’ve been in this industry for four years, give or take, and I am way more advanced than most irrigation techs, field managers, you name it, because of the hands-on stuff. It was crazy to be able to take exams and then go out and do it,” Rowles says. “The whole picture is that I wouldn’t have these opportunities that I have now if I didn’t go

to Tri-C. People say it’s all about who you know, and that’s very true. Tri-C has made me personally very successful.”

Funai says Tri-C “lays down the hammer” when it comes to the competition, asking students to sign a document pledging their effort to practicing. In their first year of participating, the school sent four or five students. For this March’s NCLC in Colorado, they’ll send a record 20 students.

“That’s probably part of our momentum as well. We really dedicate our team to being successful at that national competition,” Funai says. “As we go out and recruit and we can tell that to people, ‘Yeah, I get it. We’re a community college. Turns out, we’re the top two-year program in the nation, we’re in the top 10 every year overall.’ So honestly the big difference here is, you pay a hell of a lot less money to come to our school.” **L&L**



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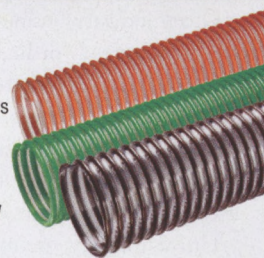
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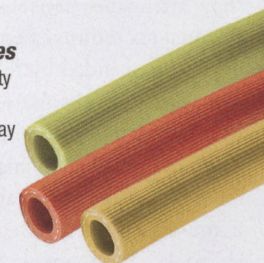
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travel & taxes

Learn which tax write-offs for trade show attendance are permissible.

By Mark E. Battersby

Industry events are a good way to gain know-how, find new suppliers and network with others in the industry. Best of all, Uncle Sam, in the form of our tax laws, is willing to pick up the expense of attending many of these events—at least for some.

Green industry businesses can deduct all non-extravagant “ordinary and necessary expenses” incurred attending business-related meetings, conferences, shows and other events. With certain limits, allowable expenses include travel, lodging, meals and associated out-of-pocket costs.

Unfortunately, many deductions for show attendance previously claimed on the personal tax returns of attendees, were temporarily suspended by the December 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act (TCJA) – the same bill that put a bigger crimp in the meals and entertainment deductions.

For a company to take the deduction, it must have the convention expenses on its books. If the owner/employee, or any attendee, pays an expense personally, they must submit an expense report detailing the expense, and the business must reimburse that expense to get the deduction.

REFORM MEALS AND ENTERTAINMENT.

The TCJA eliminated, at least until 2026, the deductibility of some itemized deductions of individuals. Targeted were miscellaneous itemized deductions subject to the former 2 percent floor. That means unreimbursed employee business expenses (including expenses for travel, lodging, meals, entertainment, continuing education and others) can no longer be claimed.

Fortunately, many of these deductions remain available for use by small businesses, including sole proprietorships. Although the TCJA isn’t too clear on how the new rules apply to business meals, under the new law, entertainment is no longer deductible.

However, no change has been made to the 50 percent deduction for business meals or the 100 percent deduction allowed for expenses incurred for recreational, social or similar activities that are primarily for the benefit of employees.

TRAVEL, MEALS AND ENTERTAINMENT.

Although the TCJA appears to have wiped out many show-related expense deductions, many remain. If, for example, business is conducted during a meal, a deduction may be available.

Of course, a deduction of 50 percent of the cost of meals incurred while traveling away from home on business is still possible.

While the tax laws limit the business meal deduction to only 50 percent of the expense, not too surprisingly, those rules contain quite a few gray areas. If, for instance, the business foots the bill to take employees to a conference, the full amount of their meals is deductible by the green industry business. The 50 percent rule applies only to the business owner.

If, on the other hand, a meal immediately precedes or follows a substantial business meeting, 50 percent of the cost can be deducted—so long as it was not “lavish or extravagant.”

Of course, if the business provides meals in a hospitality suite at a convention with the clear intent of generating business, the cost is usually deductible. Other meals, outside, that were paid for purely for goodwill purposes, may not qualify as “directly-related” to the business. Because entertainment-related meals are now treated differently from customer or client business meals, it may be necessary to account for each separately. For instance, client or customer business meals are deductible only if they are not lavish or extravagant and only if the taxpayer, or a representative, is present.

FRIENDS, FAMILY AND OTHERS. When friends, family or other guests accompany an attendee to a show, convention or conference, only the business-related portion of the expenses can be deducted. In other words, deducting the cost of the family's hotel suite is a no-no. Instead, the deduction should be limited to the cost of a single room, an amount readily available from the hotel. Of course, if a bona fide business purpose exists for the individual's presence, and can be proven, a tax deduction might result. Incidental services, such as keeping notes or assisting in entertaining customers, are not enough to make the expenses deductible. Generally, the travel expenses of someone accompanying an attendee can be deducted if that person: is an employee of the business; has a bona fide business purpose for the travel, and would otherwise be allowed to deduct the travel expenses.

CONVENTION TYPES. Any business clearing the hurdles created by our lawmakers, with the proof to support it, may deduct the entire

cost of sending attendees to a convention, show or conference (subject to the usual 50 percent limit on meals and entertainment) and minus any attendees' personal expenses. However, the rules are tighter if the event is held outside the North American area or on a cruise ship.

Cruise ship conventions: To deduct a cruise ship convention, meeting or other event, even more stringent rules exist. First, the cruise ship must be a U.S.-registered vessel. Next, the ship must make all of its ports of call in the U.S. or U.S. possessions. Finally, the tax law limits cruise ship convention deductions to only \$2,000 per year. And don't forget that you need to submit a signed, written statement stating the total days spent on the ship and how many hours were devoted to business each day. Another statement, this one from an officer of the sponsoring group or organization confirming both the scheduled activities and the attendance of the participant, is also required.

THOSE DREADED RECEIPTS. While receipts for expenses of \$75 or less are not required,

whenever business expenses are claimed, it's usually a good idea to keep detailed records and receipts for everything.

When attending a show, meeting or conference, a copy of all charges, as well as a copy of the convention schedule/agenda can help prove its relevance to your business.

To recap, as with the travel and lodging expenses of other business trips, the primary reason for attending a trade show, convention, meeting or seminar must be business-related to qualify for deductions. When it comes to events for investment, political, social or other purposes unrelated to business, only a limited expense deduction may be available. In general, all "ordinary and necessary expenses" for attending business meetings and conferences can be deducted when the expense is directly related to the business.

More guidance is available from the IRS in "Publication 463: Travel, Entertainment, Gift and Car Expenses." A copy of this publication is available at [irs.gov/forms-pubs](https://www.irs.gov/forms-pubs). **L&L**

Mark E. Battersby is a financial writer based in Pennsylvania.

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Restoration can be costly after factoring in permits, materials and maintenance needs.



Continued from pg. 77

SITE REVIEW. Collaborating with federal, state and municipal entities is essential for contractors who perform erosion control and shoreline restoration projects. For example, Lees executes permitting through the Maryland Department of the Environment, which works with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers.

"They do the federal and state review of the permits, and they review Department of Natural Resources or the Critical Area Commission, which is a Maryland program that manages anything done within 1,000 feet of tidal waters on the Chesapeake Bay," he says.

Nine times of out 10, permits are signed off without an issue. "They do listen to us and respond to our feedback," Lees says.

Huntman says his firm works with municipalities on occasion. "But the vast majority of our clients are private land owners," he says. "We work with local, state and federal planning and permitting agencies as needed to design and permit our projects."

Burdick says most of their work is also for residential clients. And, site analysis involves reviewing the vegetation type, quantity and

health. "Soils have a direct correlation to the health of the vegetated slopes," she says.

"We look for 'slumping' of soils, for example, as this is an indicator of clay soils and undercutting of the embankment will often occur with this type of soil," Burdick says. "We also look at the steepness of the slope, severity of wave action (particularly during spring tides) and evaluate a site with historical photos and current aerial photos, as well."

THE COST OF RESTORATION. Addressing the big question clients always want to know (What's the cost?) requires figuring in expenses related to permitting, installation and maintenance needs, Huntman says. "I advise potential clients to budget at least \$210 per linear foot," he says.

"Actual costs vary according to site conditions, shoreline garden and beach features included with installation, and accessibility to their shoreline."

Many homes are constructed in ways that restrict access, making it more time-consuming and logistically challenging to get materials to the site, Huntman says.

In some cases, materials can be delivered

to the site by water, Lees says. And obviously, the amount of materials impacts pricing, which is why Lees says shoreline restoration projects can range from \$250 to \$450 per linear foot depending on the scope of the project. "Larger sections of water require more engineered defenses because you have a bigger threat for wave energy and ice," he explains. "Those factors play into the swelling or deflation of the price."

Burdick's firm often does not provide a price for projects until the design is complete. "That said, based on 25 years in the industry, we can provide ballpark estimates based on the size of the project, height and length of the bank, severity of the erosion and so on," she says.

Burdick Associates provides a bio-engineered approach to shoreline stabilization and obtains contractor estimates with the design in hand, she says.

Perhaps more important than the price of the project is the cost of not executing a shoreline restoration effort when it is needed. "The best education is to discuss the nature of erosion and methods of stabilizing, and sharing photos of your past work," Burdick says. **L&L**

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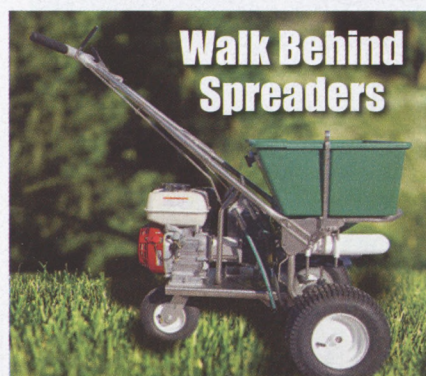
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STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

Lauren Linden

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STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

brings you the perspectives of horticulture students and insights into the future of the industry.

By Jimmy Miller



If a neighbor hadn't spotted Lauren Linden planting marigolds with her mother, it's possible she wouldn't be studying plant science at Cuyahoga Community College in Ohio.

Linden says that in high school, she didn't realize she could combine her love of art with her passion for working outdoors. Even after the neighbor, who worked at a nearby greenhouse, helped Linden line up a job there, Linden couldn't see a potential horticulture career.

After spending three semesters at the Columbus College of Art and Design – where she felt like she was getting the “art being beaten out of” her – Linden finally landed at Cuyahoga Community College, where she has emerged as one of the school's most esteemed students.

But Linden hasn't forgotten the lessons she learned in the greenhouse, where she took on a new sense of pride in the plants she helped grow.

“From there, I learned that you can actually make money off of working with plants,” Linden says. “In high school and stuff, that's never advertised. They're like, ‘Be a lawyer; be a doctor.’ They never said anything about the green industry at all.”

Now Linden uses her artistic talents in hand-sketching designs or using software. She says her art background has helped her get an idea of what she's going to create before she even officially designs it. This renewed focus is working out well for her: She won the National Collegiate Landscape Competition's CAD competition out of 34 competitors in 2018 and won it again in 2019.

While Linden says she's unsure what she's going to do long-term after graduation, she's become

fond of working with flowers, far more than she ever thought she would be. She intends to lock down an internship in commercial landscaping this summer.

Last year, she worked at a residential company and wants to diversify her experience with the commercial jobs. While there, she created an urban garden for a resident. She designed it, ordered the flowers for it and maintained it all summer.

“It was a learning curve for sure, but once I got an idea of what they were expecting of me and what materials I was allowed to use, it came easier,” Linden says.

She'll join the industry this summer when she receives her associate degree, and yet Linden worries about what it may be like to work in a profession that varies so much seasonally. That said, she also knows there are ways to work around it. She's largely excited to graduate and says she can't wait to see where she can take her passions next.

“It does seem like the industry is getting bigger and bigger every day and there's more opportunities, which seems to be more exciting for me,” Linden says. “Because ultimately what I want to do is be happy, and make money being happy.” **L&L**



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