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2020  
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**Brian Horn**  
Editor, Lawn & Landscape

“These companies aren’t just sitting by and hoping for the best.”

# Disasters in times past

**W**hen Hurricane Sandy hit the East Coast in late October of 2012, a lot of landscaping companies were able to make money during the recovery efforts.

I remember writing and hearing stories about companies who were helping in clean-up efforts, along with those who already had tree removing services to perform those tasks. But what about those companies who didn’t have the equipment to continue earning revenue through recovery work or didn’t want to be involved in that line of work? Well, they had to get creative to survive.

While interviewing people for our 2020 Technology Supplement, I spoke to David Hartzell, who is the general manager and sales manager at Best Property Maintenance Services in New Jersey, where Sandy hit the hardest. They didn’t want to compete with everyone who had a chainsaw and a truck performing tree removal. They needed a service with a high profit margin where people could be trained quickly, which led them to start a mold removal and remediation service.

You can find out how this topic relates to technology by reading the story on page 4 of the supplement, which starts in the back of the magazine. I couldn’t help but see parallels

to what businesses are going through during COVID-19. I understand there are some major differences in the two situations, but one common thread is the innovation to survive.

In the two weeks the company had to close because of the damage they sustained from Sandy, Hartzell and his team saw a need they could help fill and worked their tails off to get it up and running in time.

Stories like this are popping up now, mostly through landscaping companies offering sanitizing services. On page 50, we write about a company that added it. In a world where everyone is working to stay away from germs, your company may have the opportunity to make the germs stay away from your customer. I’ve heard of other companies attempting to do this, and from what I can tell, the jury is still out on how well it will be received. But that’s not the point.

These companies aren’t just sitting by and hoping for the best. They are thinking of ways to use the tools (both literally and figuratively) they have to survive and possibly thrive in a time of great uncertainty.

Whether it’s a pandemic, a natural disaster or a down year, the proactive companies will be the ones coming out on the other end as best as they can. — *Brian Horn*

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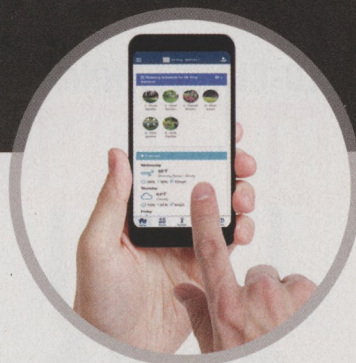


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## L&L INSIDER

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When a local elementary school raised funds to buy playground equipment but not enough to install, Al's Complete Lawn Care stepped in.

## CHARITABLE CULTURE

From playground installation to helping local high schools, a Kentucky-based company schedules volunteer projects on the daily calendar.

By Laura Bednar

**AL'S COMPLETE LAWN CARE** does more than just provide landscaping services—they've integrated charitable works into their regular operations.

President and CEO of Al's Complete Lawn Care, Allen Sweeney, points to the company's mission to explain why they complete charitable acts in their community.

Their mission statement is, "To use the opportunities God gives us in the business of professional grounds maintenance to positively impact the lives of our employees, clients and community."

Sweeney is the president of the United Way Board in a sector of Kentucky and most of the charitable projects the company does are connected to this organization. One of the projects the company took on came through United Way's "Day of Caring."

A local elementary school raised funds to purchase playground equipment but did not have the money for installation. Al's Complete Lawn Care prepped the area and demolished the old set with the help of a contractor. They then built the equipment and poured the concrete for the playground. "It made a difference in the community," Sweeney said.

While United Way is the source of many projects, Al's Complete Lawn Care will also complete projects for churches, local high schools and even internally. Sweeney said last year the company started a "care



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—Sara Jensen  
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committee" where they quietly look for needs within the company. In one instance, an employee was having a difficult time in his personal life and co-workers were able to help in several ways to make a difference in his life. "Charitable giving is done behind the scenes because you care," Sweeney said.

**FINDING THE NEED.** Each year, the company creates an annual budget with a portion of the funds allotted for "good will." While they create a budget, they do not always stick to that number. "If the need is there and we are in a position to accommodate it, we (do)," Sweeney said.

Sweeney's advice to companies looking to start charity work is to figure out how much time they are willing to give and how much money they can set aside. "Look for an opportunity that fulfills the obligation that you can afford," he said. "There are so many organizations who could use help in one form or another."

If a company is looking to offer a charitable contribution relating to landscaping, Sweeney suggested reaching out to parks or high schools. He said a company will do a better job if they're passionate about what they do.

**PROJECT LOGISTICS.** Al's Complete Lawn Care schedules their charitable projects into their regular workday.

Usually the crew with a lighter workload will take on the project and tackle it as a traditional landscaping gig. Rather than giving a few hours after a long workday, Sweeney said, "We want to make sure it's professionally done and make people feel like there's value in the service they receive."

The company may have to schedule a project two to three weeks in advance while other times the opportunities are seasonal.

Sweeney said the company tends not to complete large outdoor projects in the spring as that is a busy time for their regular services.

In the coming years, Al's Complete Lawn Care is looking to create a memorial garden at a local high school to honor high school students and teachers who have passed away.

The project would include memorial pavers, irrigation and landscaping. This project is personal for Sweeney, as he knows people at the school as well as some who would be memorialized.

He reiterated that companies should seek projects where they feel a connection. Sweeney said this type of charitable work is important because sometimes people get too busy getting things done for themselves that they forget about taking care of others.

"We make people's lives better," he said. "Not to be seen, but to make a difference."

The author is a freelancer based in Ohio.



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### GOOD WORKS

Have you completed a charity project you are proud of or helped out your community in another way? Email Editor Brian Horn at [bhorn@gie.net](mailto:bhorn@gie.net) to be considered for coverage in a future issue.





## TORO COMPANY REMEMBERS KEN

Melrose, the company's former chairman and CEO, passed away on May 3, 2020.

BLOOMINGTON, Minn. – Kendrick “Ken” B. Melrose, former chairman and chief executive officer of The Toro Co., passed away Sunday, May, 3, 2020, at the age of 79.

Melrose was an extraordinary person, whose wide-ranging accomplishments were driven by his unwavering commitment to serving others. His core values enabled him to positively impact so many throughout his professional career, during his post-retirement mission to advance the principles of Servant Leadership and in his generous philanthropic efforts.

“Ken was a great man, and the epitome of an exceptional leader,” said Rick Olson, current chairman and chief executive officer of The Toro Co. “The culture he instilled continues as a positive influence and will guide The Toro Co. long into the future. Ken was passionate about supporting the industries we serve and helping our customers succeed. The impact of his generous philanthropic initiatives will continue to positively affect many in our industry and our communities.”

Melrose joined Toro in 1970, and over the course of the following decade served in a number of leadership roles with increasing responsibility. In 1981, as the company faced challenging times, Melrose was named president. His belief in and ability to connect with people, his fortitude while making tough decisions, and his commitment to quality and innovation, all helped lead the organization through financial

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difficulty to record results at the time. His determination empowered him to see the job through and guide the enterprise not only through difficult times, but to ever-greater heights of success. Melrose did so without seeking recognition or accolades, rather he always pointed to employees as the key to what was accomplished during his tenure.

Melrose outlined his business philosophy in his book published in 1995, "Making the Grass Greener on Your Side: A CEO's Journey to Leading by Serving." As he wrote, "Everyone has the potential to contribute to achieving the goals of the company. If you unleash that potential, market leadership and financial success will be natural by-products."

After leading the company for 24 years, Melrose retired as CEO in March of 2005. During his tenure, he oversaw a number of

acquisitions including Wheel Horse, Exmark, Lawn-Boy and Hayter, and company sales grew from \$247 million to \$1.7 billion. He was also an advocate in the company's philanthropic and industry support and played an instrumental role in forming the company's partnership with The First Tee in 1998. Committed to giving back to employees, he established The Kendrick B. Melrose Family Foundation Scholarship Program in 2002 for dependents of company employees, which has supported 189 students with scholarships. He also helped establish the Melrose/Hoffman Employee Critical Need Fund in 2005 to assist employees experiencing economic hardship.

In retirement, Melrose founded Leading by Serving. In this role, he wrote and traveled extensively promoting the principles of

Servant Leadership in both public and private organizations. A champion for ethics and servant leadership, he chaired the board of directors for the Center for Ethical Business Cultures at the University of St. Thomas Opus College of Business, held the University's Holloran Endowed Professorship and was a popular lecturer among students. He was also driven to give back through a wide range of philanthropic efforts supporting employee, industry, health care, education and many other interests.

"We owe much to Ken's principled leadership, and his legacy cannot be overstated," Olson said. "He was a rare, transformational leader who saw the best in people and knew how to inspire them to work together and exceed their own expectations in order to achieve great things."

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# JUNIPER ACQUIRES GREEN SOURCE LANDSCAPE & SPORTS TURF

With this move, Juniper now employs over 1,200 people in Florida in 10 branches.

Juniper Landscaping, a landscape service provider that ranked No. 19 in Lawn & Landscape's 2020 Top 100 list, has acquired the assets of Green Source Landscape & Sports Turf in Fort Lauderdale.

This is the second acquisition in the area for Juniper and the third on the east coast of Florida.

"The gained resources and experience joining Juniper is exciting and provides increased opportunity to our employees.

"We look forward to continuing work in this market and adding value to our custom-

ers," says Jason Wingate, former CEO of Green Source.

Juniper now employs over 1,200 people in Florida in 10 branches.

"We are excited about Jason and his team, they bring a depth of talent and expertise while expanding Juniper capabilities in the region," says Brandon Duke, president of Juniper.

"Jason and his team have an excellent reputation in the market. They're considered industry leaders, especially when it comes to sports turf management," says Dan deMont, vice president of Juniper.



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NALP will likely be able to livestream a smaller variation of the ceremony this summer.

**D**ue to concerns around COVID-19, the National Association of Landscape Professionals canceled its Renewal and Remembrance ceremony this year.

For 25 years, the event honored America's veterans as landscapers lent their skills to care for and beautify Arlington National Cemetery. The following is a statement from NALP:

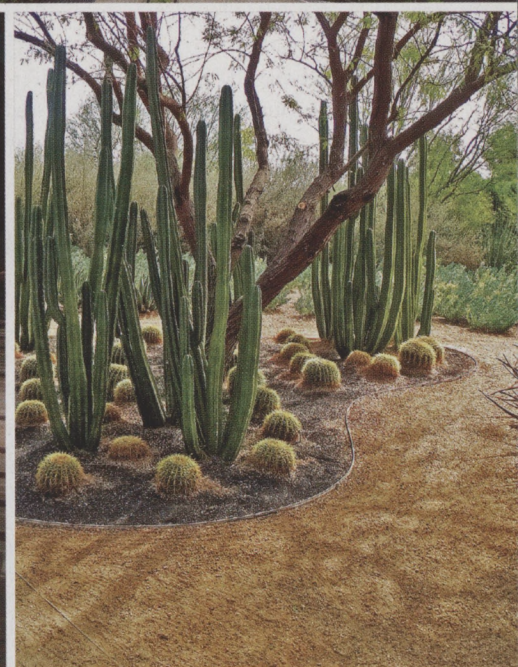
It is because of the incredible impact of this event that we've taken the deliberations very seriously around how and when to host Renewal & Remembrance 2020 in light of COVID-19. Arlington National Cemetery is currently closed to the public and although they may be open in July, they do not anticipate being able to host large events this summer. As a result, we have made the difficult decision to cancel Renewal & Remembrance and Legislative Days for 2020.

However, Arlington National Cemetery has indicated that NALP will likely be able to host a small ceremony this summer in honor of those buried at Arlington National Cemetery, and to highlight the lasting impact our industry has made on the grounds. NALP hopes to be able to livestream this ceremony. NALP will share details once confirmed.

"On behalf of the Renewal & Remembrance Committee, the NALP staff, and the Board of Directors, we will miss working side by side this summer," NALP said in a statement. "We thank all of the sponsors and volunteers who stood ready, willing, and able to come together for a great cause."

The next Renewal & Remembrance will be held on Monday, July 19, 2021. Also, NALP's Legislative Days on the Hill, will be held in conjunction with its Workforce Summit in late winter/early spring of 2021.





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## BRANDON BROWN JOINS SAVATREE

In his role as a district manager with SavATree, he will be responsible for expanding the company's reach in Florida.

BEDFORD HILLS, N.Y. – Brandon Brown, an ISA Certified Arborist and former president of Schneider Shrub and Tree Care, will join SavATree to lead its business expansion into the Florida market.

Brown graduated from Clemson University, where he studied trees and hasn't looked back since. From pioneering "Monday

Punday" to creating sustainable tree and shrub care programs for keeping them alive, Brown brings knowledge and experience to the Florida market.

In recent years, SavATree has been rapidly expanding its national presence through acquisitions into new regions. The company is excited to now pursue a number of strategic markets in Florida.

In his role as a district manager with SavATree, Brown will be building an expert team, opening new branches, identifying potential partners, and participating in a variety of industry related associations.

"We have long admired Brandon for his



**BROWN WILL ASSEMBLE A TEAM AND IDENTIFY POTENTIAL PARTNERS WHILE ALSO OPENING NEW BRANCHES AND PARTICIPATING IN INDUSTRY ASSOCIATIONS.**

contributions to the industry and are delighted to have him on the team. His deep knowledge of tree care and experience recruiting, coaching, training and building teams dovetail precisely with what we look for in a strong leader," said Daniel van Starrenburg, the executive chairman.

"I am thrilled to be a part of this venture to develop and grow a new market for a company as well regarded as SavATree," Brown said.

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# CULTIVATE TRADE SHOW TRANSFORMED INTO ONLINE EVENT

Cultivate'20 Virtual will debut the week of July 13, 2020.

COLUMBUS, Ohio – With continuing uncertainty around the COVID-19 pandemic, AmericanHort transformed Cultivate, the annual tradeshow and conference, from an in-person event in Columbus, Ohio this July to Cultivate'20 Virtual, a fully online event that will connect customers, suppliers, and

colleagues across the industry. Cultivate'20 Virtual will debut the week of July 13, 2020.

“We’re excited to provide a safe and innovative environment where the horticulture industry can still come together, share best practices, learn from each other and connect with peers”, said Ken Fisher, AmericanHort President & CEO. “Although it will be different from the face-to-face interaction we experience at Cultivate, attendees can still find much-needed resources and be able to

engage with the new products, new varieties and top-notch industry education to help their business and organization perform better and improve.”

Cultivate'20 Virtual will feature many of the same experiences found at the annual event, such as a 3-D digital tradeshow where exhibitors and attendees can share information, view video presentations, chat live and make the same connections one would at an in-person event.

Over 50 live education sessions will be offered covering all aspects of the horticulture industry along with vibrant demonstrations of new varieties and new products featured in an innovative digital environment. Attendees can also experience the HRI online Garden Party, an event to socialize and show appreciation for the work of HRI supporters

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and researchers. There will be a virtual town hall, roundtable discussion groups and a variety of opportunities for online networking and interaction.

“We’ve all had to learn to be innovative and adapt our business practices to this challenging environment. I’m excited to be part of an online option that allows our

industry to connect with peers and continue to maintain a sense of community,” said Susie Raker-Zimmerman, vice president of Raker Roberta’s Young Plants and chairwoman of the AmericanHort board of directors.

An Expo-Only pass is free for everyone, and the All-Access education pass is free for AmericanHort members and is discounted for non-members.

## JOHN DEERE UNVEILS NEW PAYMENT PROGRAM


The “Own it” program is for select compact construction equipment models.

MOLINE, Ill. – A new, monthly John Deere payment program is available for customers who want to own John Deere’s five compact excavators, skid steers and compact track loader models. The 17G and 30G excavators, 312GR and 316GR skid steers or 317G compact track loader are eligible to receive special financing options.

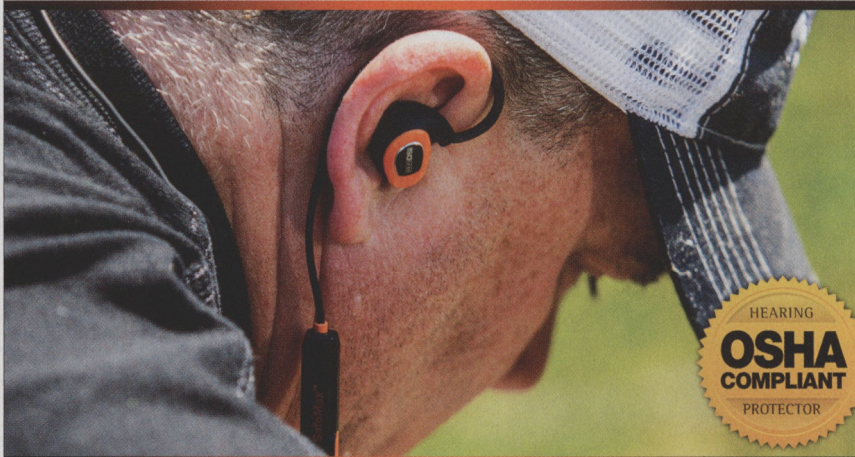
“We are eager to offer a program that can financially support compact equipment customers and empower them to become machine owners as they grow their businesses,” said Juan Raya, manager, Global Compact Construction Sales at John Deere Construction & Forestry. “The ‘Own It’ financial program provides flexibility for customers maintaining small fleets, giving them the quality they expect from a John Deere machine, without breaking the bank.”

Customers who purchase the select equipment models through October 2020 are eligible to receive special financing. To learn more about the “Own It” payment plan, contact an authorized John Deere Compact Equipment Dealer or visit [JohnDeere.com/OwnIt](http://JohnDeere.com/OwnIt). L&L

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# SURVIVE THIS ECONOMY

PT. 2

- **IN MY LAST ARTICLE**, I wrote about how important your “state of mind” is when it comes to running a successful (or unsuccessful) business. Successful leaders think and act differently than unsuccessful ones. Preparing for and responding to a crisis, whether it’s a recession or the COVID-19 pandemic, is all about how you think. It’s imperative that you think “outside of the box” and be proactive with your team and your circumstances.

Let’s look at what you can do once you find yourself in a crisis where cash flow is seriously reduced. We’ll look at what you can do both short-term and long-term as you lead yourself, your team and your company through such a situation.

**SHORT-TERM RESPONSE.** First, similar to a pilot who finds himself flying into the fog, you have to get on your instruments. Otherwise, you could be flying upside down and not realize it. You need objective data to tell you where you are. Here are the tools (or “instruments”) that my clients use:

**1. Annual budget:** Your budget is a document that looks to the future for your divisions and/or company. It provides objective revenue goals and production benchmarks for each division. This document tells you and your team the sales goal that you need to shoot for. It also establishes tangible benchmarks for costs such as field labor, materials and equipment. Most importantly, it allows you and your team to see your progress (or lack of progress).

**2. Bidding and estimating worksheet:** This worksheet also looks to the future for individual projects or accounts. It helps you manage risk by establishing goals for field labor, equipment and materials. Field labor



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

comprises 90% of your risk, and this worksheet establishes man-hour goals to help you measure and control risk.

**3. Job-costing worksheet:** This worksheet looks at past performance and provides a reality check of sorts. Since field labor jeopardizes your profitability more than anything else, this worksheet should primarily focus upon your budgeted-to-actual man-hours for each project or account.

**4. Profit and loss (P&L) statement:** The P&L also measures past performance, but on a division or company-wide scale. If formatted properly, it can tell how you are doing compared to your annual budget.

**5. The Bid Board lead tracker worksheet:** This is perhaps your most important tool. It tells you what’s in the pipeline and whether you’re on track to hit your sales goals. Cash is king in a recession. First, each and every lead needs to be tracked to ensure that it doesn’t fall through the crack. This worksheet allows you to do that.

Second, you have to network like crazy and be proactive at

finding solutions to help you work more efficiently and market more effectively.

**LONG-TERM RESPONSE.** Since recessions and crises are inevitable, entrepreneurs should always have contingency plans – both short- and long-term – to counter their effects on their businesses. Here are some long-term suggestions:

**1. Build a service base:** Too many entrepreneurs provide services that are severely affected by recessions or crises. They enjoy creating construction projects, for example, so that is all they do. Construction projects are the first casualty in a recession. Just like football, if you live by the blitz, you’ll die by the blitz. It’s not a question if there will be another crisis; it’s a question of when.

Smart entrepreneurs don’t just do what they like to do. They do what is best for their business. It may not excite you, but providing services such as lawn maintenance, irrigation, lawn care, pest control, tree care, plant health care, etc., just may provide the cash flow that gets you through a crisis and allows you to sleep at night.

**2. Build a cash reserve:** It may be difficult, but it’s important that you prepare for a rainy day. Open a money-market account, a savings


account, whatever; but force yourself to regularly deposit cash into this account.

**3. Build good management systems in your business:** Remember, “What gets measured, gets done!” Build the systems and provide the tools that allow you and your team to measure whether you’re being successful or not. This takes time, training and treasure (money). The things that you should be doing to prepare for and respond to a down economy are the things that you should be doing anyway. There’s nothing new here.

**CONCLUSION.** In order to build a successful business, you have to be prepared for any and all contingencies. To be prepared, you have to think like a leader. Successful leaders think and act differently. There are things that you can do short term and those that you can do long term in order to build a business that can weather just about any storm it faces. Being an entrepreneur is not for the faint of heart. It’s a constant mental battle – a state of mind. It’s one that you can win, if you’re willing to train yourself and your team to do so. **L&L**

Contact Jim Huston at  
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# RECONSIDERING SAFETY

• **IS SAFETY A CORE VALUE**, an actionable objective, a mindset or a priority? The answer is all of the above.

Today, more than ever, safety and health strategies are inextricably entwined as drivers of performance, culture and risk management. As the pandemic disrupted norms for human interaction and social distancing became a thing, businesses across our industry faced a new set of workplace challenges.

Before COVID-19, workplace safety was hazard, job site and incident-and injury-related. Post-COVID, the safety story is broader: It's about having cultural practices in place so workers don't get sick and infectious disease agents don't spread.

At some point, this crisis will pass and when it does, one thing is certain: Our businesses will all be better positioned to prosper with accelerated prevention measures and a precautionary mindset.

At the tactical level, advanced health and safety workplace



**DAVID KRYSH** is a talent sourcing and workforce specialist with Bruce Wilson & Company.

programs manage exposure and liability, and reflect a long-term vision of your leadership in the communities and clients you serve. More importantly, from a recruiting and retention standpoint, a safe place to work will make your business a great place to work. New hires and job-seekers will prioritize their personal health and safety as well as their career paths. When hiring for cultural fits, if your culture stresses cleanliness, it's a competitive advantage.

June is National Safety Month, and while the health and safety of your employees and the clients you serve should be celebrated

every month, here are a few best practices that can have a big impact on your post-pandemic success.

## **1. RECOGNIZE THE DIFFERENCE BETWEEN A SAFETY MANAGER AND A SAFETY LEADER.**

A manager makes things happen; a leader shows you why it's important. Most companies are very strong on the managing side. They know how to implement. When leaders get it right, it's an example for the rest of the team. If senior management doesn't get it right, then everything else is like swimming upstream.

## **2. INTEGRATE SAFETY INTO THE PROCESSES OF THE BUSINESS.**

Make safety strategically actionable and an extension of your workplace brand. Offer safety training and certification, have emergency preparedness meetings, offer CPR and health fairs, find ways to seek recognition and highlight and promote safety successes. Enact best practices, procedures and processes across all levels of your organization. Publish your standards and practices to your website and include informa-

tion about being a safe place to work on your hiring notices.

## **3. MAKE SAFETY MEASURABLE AND ACCOUNTABLE.**

Encourage your entire team to take personal responsibility for their own and each other's safety from the day they're hired. Recruit, onboard, develop and train all employees around your health and safety protocols and find ways to make your staff feel protected. Include them in incident investigations, participation on audit teams, task forces and other safety and wellness-related activities. A workforce that identifies with a company's commitment to care about them will never be mediocre.

COVID-19 changed our world and our workplace. If your company was already on the leading edge of cultural practices, not much has changed. For the rest? It's an opportunity to usher in a new era in workplace safety.

"Take care of your employees and your employees will take care of your business," has never been more relevant. **L&L**

Contact David Krysh  
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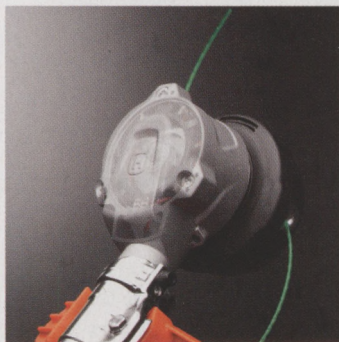
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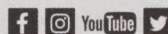
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# YOUR COMPANY'S BACKBONE

- **IT'S HARD TO BELIEVE** that I started my landscaping business 49 years ago. What's also hard to believe is that in 1971, there were no mobile phones, computers, riding rotary mowers, electronic calculators, fax machines and the list goes on and on. Because of the lack of modern equipment, it was difficult to grow a large landscape company. As a result, there were many small ones.

It took me about 10 years to reach my first \$1 million in sales. During that time, I wore most "hats," including mechanic, salesman, crew supervisor, designer, account manager and more. I can't remember exactly when, but sometime in the early 80s, I moved my best foreman – a horticultural graduate from our state college, U-Conn – into the account manager position. I made the move primarily to keep my sanity.

My new account manager did pretty much everything I did. Of course, we did it together for a while until he and I felt both felt confident enough for him to go out on his own.

He had many responsibilities that kept him busy all day. He handled morning dispatch, made sure his enhancement crews had the materials they needed for their jobs, supervised the work on the enhancement jobs, monitored the quality of the maintenance crews, met clients for service requests or extra work, created estimates and



**ED LAFLAMME**, co-founder of the Harvest Group, is a professional speaker, author, business adviser and coach.

proposals for those jobs, brought equipment to crews when their equipment broke down and made sure they all got back to the shop at the end of the day. Whew. Today we call this a "production-focused account manager" (AM).

After a few years, because of the volume of work and the demands of our clients, I had to do something to help my AM. For example, my corporate clients would call in the morning and want to see either me or my AM that same day. They all wanted service and wanted it fast. In order to accommodate my clients, I could either bring on another AM, as most companies would, or create a new position to work under the AM who was in charge of managing operations. By doing this, they

could split the responsibilities – one would be client-focused, the other operations/production-focused. I called this new position my field supervisor. Some companies call this the production manager.

This new position really worked out well, and took the weight off the AM. That's why today we call this type of AM "client-focused." They are responsible for client communications, selling enhancement work, monitoring job quality and making sure the jobs are making money.

The new client-focused AM had many advantages. For example, they have the time to sell more enhancement jobs, usually doubling or tripling the sales of the traditional production-focused manager. They can handle a much larger book of business, and the clients were much happier because of the attention they were getting.

The field supervisors monitored job quality, the production hours, trained the crews and made sure all safety procedures were followed. As a result of these changes, our bottom line grew as well.

If you have production-based account managers and wondering what it takes to make the change, let me give you some tips.

The AM in the client-focused role is more of an executive position.

They generally drive a car (since they don't need a truck); they need to be proficient in selling enhancements, estimating, pricing, building client relationships; and negotiating when needed. They also need to know how to start up a new job, and close down one the company lost. They need to know how to deal with subcontractors and have good time management skills to get their work done.

After reading this, I'm sure you understand a talented person is needed for this job. Since colleges only have 10-15% of the horticultural students they had 25 years ago, companies are now hiring teachers, former property managers, salespeople and the like to fill these rolls. This leaves considerable weight on owners and other managers to train them.

Which type of AM do you have? I guess the answer varies from company to company. If you take one thing from this article, it's important to recognize AMs are the backbone of the company. With training in client-focused and production-focused skills needed to do their job, they will make your company a lot of money. **L&L**

Contact Ed Laflamme  
at [harvest@giemedia.com](mailto:harvest@giemedia.com)

**I'M SURE YOU UNDERSTAND A TALENTED  
PERSON IS NEEDED FOR THIS JOB."**





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**LEGISLATIVE LANDSCAPE** is a bi-monthly column by Andrew Bray, Vice President, Government Relations, for the National Association of Landscape Professionals

## CONGRESSIONAL ACTION DURING COVID-19

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, Congress was forced to act quickly and provide immediate relief for those that have been most impacted. The National Association of Landscape Professionals has been engaged with Congressional offices to support these efforts. To date, three COVID-19 related stimulus packages have been passed.

The first package, passed March 6, provided \$8.3 billion in relief.

### Key programs included:

- Funding to federal, state and local agencies to combat COVID-19
- Providing waivers for Medicare telehealth restrictions
- Investments in vaccine research

The second package, passed on March 14, the Families First Act provided \$192 billion in relief. Key programs included:

- 14-day paid sick leave for those impacted by COVID-19
- Extended paid family medical leave for those impacted by COVID-19
- Payroll tax credits for employers
- Increased funding for food stamps
- Funding for COVID-19 testing

The third package, passed on March 25, The Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act (CARES) provided \$2 trillion in relief. Key programs included:

- Paycheck Protection Program
- Main Street Lending Program
- Direct payments to individuals and families
- CDC/DHS funding
- Aviation industry bailout
- Student loan suspension
- Unemployment expansion

\*\*A Supplemental to the CARES Act passed on April 20 provided an additional \$450 billion in relief mainly toward replenishing PPP along with additional funding for hospitals and testing devices.\*\*

Congress is now looking to the next round of coronavirus relief in the face of new figures from the Department of Labor that show that unemployment climbed to 14.7% in April and is expected to reach 20% or higher in May.

The House may vote on a Democratic stimulus plan that is seen as a Democratic marker for negotiations with the White House over the next economic stimulus package. House Members are also expected to vote on rules change that would allow proxy voting for Representatives who are unable to travel to Washington due to health concerns.

The Democratic stimulus package is likely to contain: additional aid for state and local governments; additional stimulus payments to individuals; a further expansion of unemployment benefits; funding for the U.S. Postal Service and student loan forgiveness for health care workers. The bill will not include President Trump's request for changes to the payroll and capital gains tax.

**As fiscal conservatives grow concerned and partisan bickering amplifies, the next stimulus will likely take more time and involve debates over some major partisan issues including:**

- Funding for states
- Funding for remote and absentee voting
- Increasing access to food programs
- Employment payroll tax deduction
- Infrastructure funding
- Additional industry "bail outs"

House Republican Leader McCarthy (CA) is calling for hearings and an analysis of the impact of the previous stimulus bills before proceeding with a new package. Senate Majority Leader McConnell (R-KY) has expressed similar sentiments.

**NALP is monitoring negotiations closely and will keep you updated. NALP will be specifically focusing on:**

- More access to capital for those businesses that have been adversely impacted by COVID-19
- Incentives for homeowners, businesses and local governments to invest in landscape services via tax credits or grants
- Limiting liability for companies where a transmission of COVID-19 has occurred

NALP will continue to represent the landscape industry on Capitol Hill and look for opportunities to support programs that benefit the landscape industry and the customers we service. **L&L**

**Editor's note:** This article was written on May 8, 2020. You can contact Bray at [andrew@landscapeprofessionals.org](mailto:andrew@landscapeprofessionals.org) for the most current information.

**AS U.S. UNEMPLOYMENT NEARS 20%,**

Congress will try to pass another stimulus that may take more time than before.



# SHARPENING THE SAW



## SOFTWARE: The Most Important Investment for Your Future

By Kevin Kehoe

**C**ovid is a reminder that times aren't always good, change is ever present, and the fundamentals are essential.

The most important fundamental is: Good systems provide good information that aids your people in making better decisions—decisions that result in profits. This is essential, as the quality of your people's decisions is directly linked to the timeliness and accuracy of the information they have.

This means making an investment in software information systems is a direct investment in the personal productivity of your people that delivers more returns than an equal dollar investment made

in labor, management, and equipment. Information makes everyone and everything more efficient. (See Sidebar 1: Return on Investment.)

Investing in software information systems becomes especially critical when you consider that we are experiencing current and long-term shortages in crew labor and management talent. (See Sidebar 2: Talent Shortage—Recruitment and Retention.)

### SIDEBAR 1: Return on Investment

For a commercial maintenance company with an annual revenue of \$3M, the ROI can be expected on the investments shown below (based on actual industry benchmarks)

| INVESTMENT   | ROI         |
|--|-------------|
| <b>\$1,140,000</b> or <b>38%</b> of revenue<br><b>LABOR</b>    | <b>210%</b> |
| <b>\$390,000</b> or <b>13%</b> of revenue<br><b>MANAGEMENT</b> | <b>240%</b> |
| <b>\$420,000</b> or <b>14%</b> of revenue<br><b>EQUIPMENT</b>  | <b>280%</b> |
| <b>\$37,500</b> or <b>1.3%</b> of revenue<br><b>SOFTWARE</b>   | <b>470%</b> |

### SIDEBAR 2: Talent Shortage—Recruitment and Retention

*The crew labor shortage is well documented. Restrictions related to H2B and a robust construction economy have reduced the once abundant ranks of foreman and crew talent. What we don't talk about enough and should is the looming shortage of management talent in sales, account and customer, operations, and administrative management.*

*This shortage starts in our farm system—the colleges. Landscape management programs are contracting due to lack of students. It seems that parents do not want to fund an expensive education when the perceived lifetime earnings are lower than many other occupations.*

*The answer is simple: We will have to pay more to attract and retain the kind of talent required in a growing landscape company. Paying higher salaries means these managers will have to produce more to offset the increase in compensation. But they cannot produce more with the current software and technology used across much of the industry today.*



A software information system is no longer a nice-to-have investment. It is an essential one. Productivity improvements, driven by information systems, are revolutionizing every industry.

For example, every sports organization now has an information systems department in the front office. This department did not exist 15 years ago. Today, it is key to running a successful ball club.

*With the way Aspire integrates our business operations, all our teams now have clarity on exactly what services to perform for each customer and when, with a clear resource plan for executing those services.*

*And because our local managers have thought through and loaded their job-by-job plans into Aspire upfront, our team knows that we'll have a successful outcome if we execute to what's in Aspire. As a result, our execution has never been tighter to our goals.*

— **Tim Portland**, Chairman & CEO  
Yellowstone Landscape

#### **SIDEBAR 3: Industry Software Investment and Net Profit Profile**

For a commercial maintenance company with an annual revenue of \$3M, investing the additional \$34,500 in software and applying the projected ROI will produce the target net profit shown below.

These organizations are investing in data and information systems for three simple reasons: (1) to improve the managers in-game decision making, (2) to improve player performance, and (3) to win more games. These same objectives are relevant to our industry.

The reality is that our industry is lagging behind in making these investments, and it shows in both net profits and investment spending. We must catch up. (See Sidebar 3: Industry Net Profit & Investment Profile.)

### **Where do you begin?**

You begin sharpening the saw by increasing the productivity of your people. Every contractor must execute in three areas:

- » Getting the work,
- » Doing the work, and
- » Keeping the work

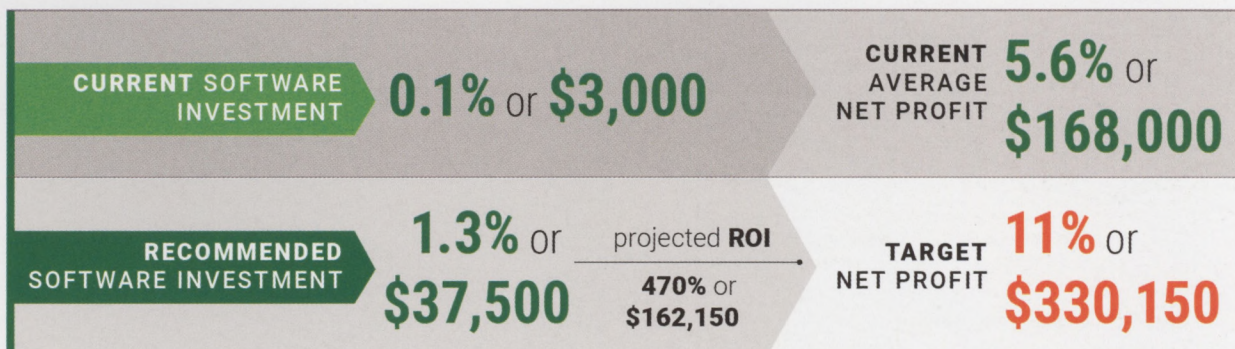
The players responsible for these activities are "ground zero" for productivity improvement: sales, account management, and operations management.

These players must be more productive using the primary resource they have available to them—TIME. The fact is they are not.

How much more productive can these players be, and what does that mean for net profits? (See Sidebar 4: Time and Money.)

Information technology is essential to the future for our industry—just as it is for all other industries. It's never too late to sharpen your saw.

We invite you to speak with an Aspire Software client. Talk to them about how our system has helped them in this downturn.





They will tell you that without it they would have been in big trouble selling, managing customers, and doing the work.

Kevin Kehoe is the co-founder of Aspire Software and an industry veteran who has consulted with many landscaping companies during previous downturns, including the 2008-2009 Great Recession.

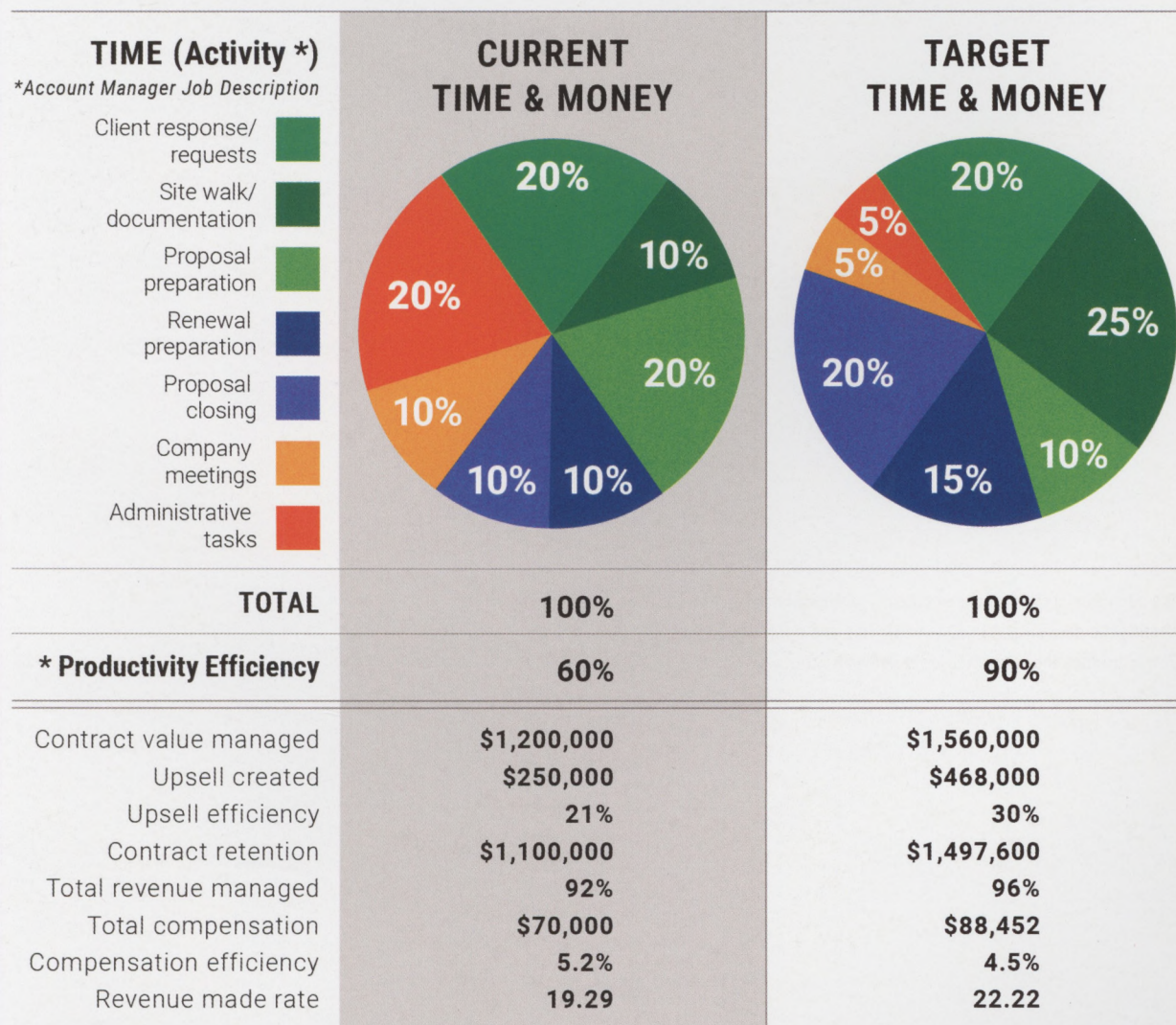
*I've been in business 36 years, and before Aspire, we could never quite get all the information we needed to make the proper decisions. Now that we've implemented Aspire, we can make decisions based on facts.*

*Aspire has enabled us to weather the pandemic, and I believe, formulate a plan to exit from this strong and ready to GROW!*

— Marty Grunder, CEO  
Grunder Landscaping & The GROW Group


#### SIDEBAR 4: Time and Money

Software shifts time from low-value to high-value activities, producing (1) more revenue per person: \$22.22 vs. \$19.29, and (2) a lower compensation to revenue cost of 4.5% vs. 5.2%. These two effects address the talent recruiting and retention issue as well as net margin challenges. Personal productivity is where the game will be won over the next decade in our industry.



Total revenue managed = Contract value less losses plus upsells  
Revenue made rate = Total revenue divided by total compensation





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Kristen Fefes



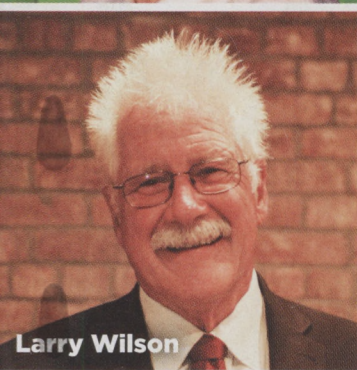
Warren Gorowitz



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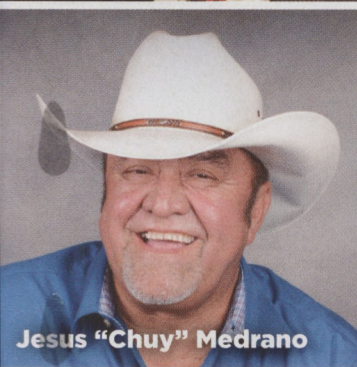
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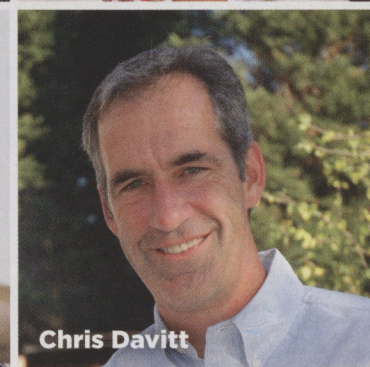
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# WE'RE LOOKING FOR THE NEXT LEADERSHIP CLASS & THE NEXT EMERGING LEADER

Do you know of someone in the green industry who deserves to be recognized for their years of great leadership? Or is there an up-and-comer who is really making a positive impact in the industry?

If so, send your nominations for the next Leadership Class and the next Emerging Leader to Editor Brian Horn at [bhorn@gie.net](mailto:bhorn@gie.net).

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# ONE IN A N

Rafael Garcia's father is an icon at Grasshoppers in Florida, but Rafael has carved out his own legacy through serving his coworkers.

**By Jimmy Miller**

**L**ast year, Mike Murphy and his team asked employees who deserved a new company award for the worker who showed the most dedication to Grasshoppers. The answers they heard were almost unanimous – the award belonged to Rafael Garcia, the lawn maintenance foreman supervisor who has spent nine consecutive years and counting at Grasshoppers.

His credentials proved overwhelming: He mentors other employees, even ones that Murphy worried about before Rafael worked with them to make them better. He's been picking up several coworkers for years, ensuring they have a reliable way to get to work, although he has to be up at 5 a.m. or earlier as a result. Rafael has even purchased work boots and clothes for other employees who weren't able to afford them, and Murphy says he did it without expecting anything in return.

Perhaps it's a coincidence – or perhaps it runs in Rafael's family – but the award he gratefully accepted last year is named after his father, Felix Garcia, who spent roughly 18 years at Grasshoppers before retiring a few years ago.

"I started here because my dad worked here," Rafael says. "Like we always say in this company, we're like a family here. We take care of everybody. It's not just the guys on top."

Murphy, the company's vice president of operations, has been with Grasshoppers for three years and has watched both Rafael and Felix hard at work.

"His dad was very beloved by everybody here," he says. "We're very, very fortunate to have those two in a row. It's just kind of ironic that Rafael wins it, but hands down, he deserved it."

**CALL IT A COMEBACK.** Those who are at the top of Grasshoppers' chain of command have basically known Rafael since he was a child. Felix was an employee at the company shortly after Tonya Windham and her husband, Ryan, started the company in 2002. Landscape Consultant Mike Williams fondly remembers working with Felix, who "never said no" and made sure every client was satisfied.

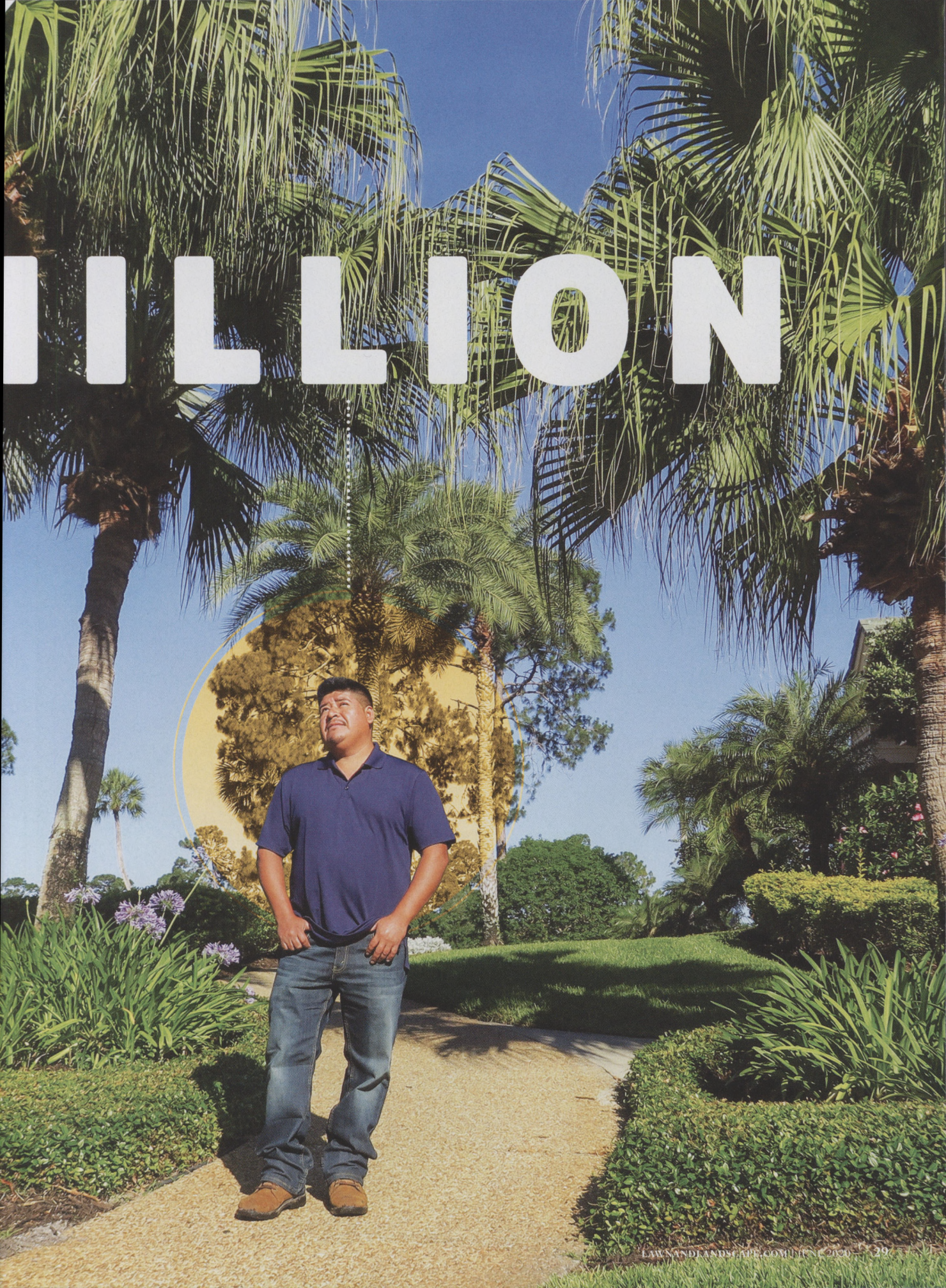
"Felix Garcia was a very hard worker. He was always dedicated and went above and beyond for the company," Williams says. "He always rolled up his sleeves and did it. That's why they created the award when he retired."

But once Felix retired, it wasn't as though that same high-level production went away. Rafael's work ethic and drive closely mirror





# MILLION









**“We’ve seen (Rafael)  
grow and excel in all  
the different stages of his life.  
He’s a loving husband  
and awesome dad.**

**To watch him be the best  
in all aspects of his life,  
it’s been a true inspiration.”**

**Tonya Windham, co-owner, Grasshoppers**

that of his father’s, Tonya says. She had a mental checklist of all the things she wanted out of potential employees when the company first opened. Now, it’s up to 52 employees and Rafael “exceeds that checklist.”

“The funny thing about our relationship with Rafael is that me and my husband have had the privilege of watching him grow up for 18 years,” she says.

“We’ve seen him grow and excel in all the different stages of his life. He’s a loving husband and awesome dad. To watch him be the best in all aspects of his life, it’s been a true inspiration.”

Rafael even worked with the company in the early 2000s before moving on after a two-year stint. But he left to try working for other employers, primarily to sample the market and see what other companies had to offer.

But Rafael continued to only work short stints rather than find a long-term place to develop his career. After a series of employments that only lasted a year or just months before he moved on, his father urged him to rejoin Grasshoppers, where Rafael’s worked ever since. The decade of being away from Grasshoppers turned out to make him actually miss it most, Rafael says.

“I’m really happy here,” he says. “The owners, they’re really nice, they really take care of everybody. I always try to be better and better.”

**TAKING CARE OF BUSINESS.** As Rafael continued to receive promotions during his second time around at Grasshoppers, Tonya says it’s helped him relate to the rest of the team because he’s been there before. He adds that he remembers what each job on the team is like and often keeps that in mind as he advises them on how to handle each position.

That said, she believes he’s a natural-born leader. She recalls a time when he and her husband were out on a property doing traditional maintenance work, and Rafael suggested they start mowing at a different angle.

While she couldn’t remember exactly what his suggestion was, and though it was a bit unusual, it ultimately proved to improve the way the lawn appeared immediately.

“He’s not just out to do his job and go home at the end of the day. He wants everything pristine,” she says. “That was an eye-opener for both me and my husband. He’s one in a million.”

Rafael’s work doesn’t go unnoticed. Williams says that when Grasshopper is showing

their properties to prospective clients, they are often looking at properties that Rafael maintains. His accounts “always look the best,” Williams says.

And Murphy adds that he spends time getting to know the clients well, even meeting some of the members of a commercial property’s board of directors or HOAs.

“You should see him in action,” Murphy says. “He’s always willing to help a lending hand to his people. He’s hands-on, he leads by example. He’s that kind of guy.”

Rafael says he’s constantly trying to educate his clients just as much as he is taking care of their properties. He wants them to understand why his crews are doing what they’re doing.

“I really try to be honest with the customers. I try to be honest with everybody. I feel good doing that and I like when they’re really happy,” he says. “They thank me for explaining this (service).”

**A BIG HEART.** Perhaps most vitally, Williams says Rafael’s leadership among his coworkers brings tremendous value to the company. Murphy adds that the company’s employee retention rate is high because Rafael is turning every employee into a “superstar.” Even workers who showed early signs of being difficult to teach have become good pupils under Rafael’s watchful eye.

“He’s a mentor to a lot of the guys. He teaches them. He’s not just someone who gives them orders,” Williams says. “He helps them grow.”

Murphy commends Rafael’s work ethic and says he has a “whatever-it-takes” attitude, though he never drops his trademark optimism. He recalls instances where crews have been stranded out in the field after hours, still handling some work they fell behind on, and Rafael volunteered to jump into a truck to help out. He easily could’ve just gone home much like other coworkers, but he opted to instead help his fellow employees.

Even in moments where he could easily get frustrated, he rolls up his sleeves – much like his father – and gets to work.

“He’s got a big heart,” Murphy says. “He wants people to succeed.” **L&L**



# A CALLING TO CARE

Orlando Chavez has two passions in life – providing great service to his customers and giving back to his community.

By Kim Lux

**O**rlando Chavez says he doesn't need much, and his numerous charity endeavors are a way to pay it forward for what he does have.

During the day, Chavez is the grounds maintenance manager at Executive Property Maintenance in Plymouth, Michigan.

He holds several certifications and designations from the National Association of Landscape Professionals and the Michigan Green Industry Association. In his spare time, he can be found giving back to those in need.

"I like to help people," he says. "I come from Mexico, and I saw that people needed help. Over there I did not have the opportunities I have here. I live a little better here. I can pay it back for all the things God gives me."

**HUMBLE BEGINNINGS.** In Mexico, Chavez said he was working long hours for very little money. Chavez moved to the U.S. in 2007 and has been in the green industry ever since.

"When I moved to this country (landscaping) was my first job," he says. "I worked for another company for eight years and then I moved to this company and they gave me more opportunities to grow."

Chavez says he enjoys a lot about the industry, but his favorite element is improving a home's overall aesthetic.

"I don't feel like it's ever hard for me," he says. "When you go to a house, the first impression is the landscaping. That's why I like it, because we make the homeowners smile with our work."

Upon his arrival in the U.S., Chavez taught himself how to speak English.

"When I moved to this country, my primary language was Spanish," he says. "It's funny but the way I learned a little bit of English was by listening to the radio. When you learn English, you feel like so many doors open for you."

With being bilingual, Chavez is now able to train all kinds of employees at Executive.

"I have workers who don't speak English, so with being bilingual, I can explain to those guys what they have to do and the way they have to do the job," he says. "I completely understand how they feel because I was in that position a couple years ago. You have no idea what the customers told you or what your boss is telling you."

Chavez says the language barrier also inspires some of his charity work.

"The Latino community needs a lot of help," he says. "The problem is not too many people speak English or have the opportunity to learn a new language. I know people who've been here for 20 years and still don't know English. This is why I like to help."

William "Bill" Moore, president of Executive Property Maintenance, says Chavez is a prime example of what hard work can lead to.

"I'm so proud of him," he says. "I use him as an example all the time. He proves you can be anything you want to be. If you work hard, and treat people the right way, it'll come back on you and you'll be successful."

**TAKING ON TOUGH TASKS.** Moore says Chavez is the first employee in the office and the last to leave every day. He adds that it's the little things Chavez does without being asked that makes him a standout employee.

One of those things is managing the company's Facebook page.

"When I moved to this company, I asked them, 'Do you guys have a Facebook page?' They told me yes, but no one takes care of it," Chavez says.

"I started taking pictures, posting them and then people started making more phone calls and we





started getting more business. I'm proud of my team, and I like to show everyone the great job we do."

From early on, Moore says he challenged Chavez and he shined with each opportunity.

"I'm a believer in everybody needs an opportunity," Moore says. "I like the fact that he's constantly looking out for the company and the customer."

Chavez said his typical days starts with organizing the crews and routes.

Moore says Chavez is also the one to order fuel and materials while still finding the time to recruit new employees.

"If we need additional labor or employees, he puts the word out," Moore says. "He's out there grinding away. The guys see that. He's not just pointing fingers from a truck. He's out there getting it done."

Moore says he hopes Chavez's attitude inspires others within the company.

**A FAMILY AFFAIR.** Chavez says that by treating his crews like family, he gets the best out of them.

"Every job we do, we do as a team," he says. "We have to work together. I tell them if you have a problem, let me know and I will help you. I treat everyone like family; like they are my brothers. If you treat your workers like a family, they'll feel comfortable and feel like it's not just a job."

Moore says the company's culture promotes this closeness among its employees.

"We rarely have turnover of staff," he says. "My guys are family-oriented. They all lean on each other. They're a work family during the day, but if anyone ever needs anything, we've got 40 guys who have your back 24/7."

To prove that he is all in for his co-workers, Chavez did something drastic when someone from the team had a medical issue.

"Last year, one of my co-workers had cancer," he says. "He's still receiving treatment. I went to him and he told me he felt depressed because he loves his hair."

"I was with Bill and I told him what happened and said, 'I want to show Eddie he's not alone in this.' Bill asked what I wanted to do, and I told him I wanted to shave my hair. I shaved it and sent a picture to my co-worker. He called and said, 'You made me smile and showed me I'm not alone in this battle.'"



**HELPING HAND.** Chavez's goodwill didn't end with shaving his head. He is actively involved with several nonprofit organizations in his community.

One of his endeavors includes dressing up like a superhero once a year.

"I knew a lady who had a son with autism," he says. "She was celebrating his birthday with a party. I asked her if she needed help and she asked me to come over and play with the kids. I told her I had an Iron Man costume and would show up dressed as Iron Man. That was six years ago. Now, I'm part of a team and every year we celebrate Autism Awareness Month on April 2. Every year we make it bigger and bigger."

Unfortunately, this year's event was canceled due to the COVID-19 pandemic, but Chavez says he's eager to get back to it soon.

Moore says that during this trying time,

**"(Orlando is) out there grinding away. The guys see that. He's not just pointing fingers from a truck. He's out there getting it done."**

**Bill Moore, president, Executive Property Maintenance**

Chavez's charity has been even more remarkable.

"During this COVID-19 crisis, he was willing to have some lady put makeup on him to raise money to feed families in need," he says.

Chavez says the money raised from the project will go to buying groceries for families who've lost jobs because of the coronavirus.

Another annual volunteer opportunity for Chavez is Day of Service, which is organized by the Michigan Green Industry Association.

"We do it every year," Chavez says. "Bill

doesn't have to ask me if I'm going to do it. He already knows."

In 2019, Executive Property and other local landscapers visited Methodist Children's Home Society in Redford, Michigan. Moore says Chavez was using an excavator to plant trees for the kids and then let them check out the machines and honk the horns.

Chavez says the experience had a major impact on him.

"We went there and planted fruit trees for the kids and it was so sad," he says. "Kids have

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to have their parents, and they don't. I'm so lucky to have grown up with a family, but those kids don't have that opportunity."

**A BRIGHT FUTURE.** Moore says that while Chavez has dozens of redeeming qualities, there are a few he hopes that others notice most.

"The biggest takeaways are be proactive, lead, have some compassion and a good attitude," he says. "Orlando is an outstanding citizen, an outstanding employee and honestly he just cares. His heart is always in the right place."

Moore says that as his business grows, he hopes to keep challenging Chavez to reach his full potential.

"What I see for him is taking this company to another level," Moore says. "We've got a lot of great people, structure and policies and procedures. I'd like to take on another venture in another state. I see him taking on some of my roles in that venture."

Chavez has the same vision for the future.

"I want to try and help Bill build this company a little bigger," he says. "I also want to keep making things easy for everyone. This is not just a job – it's a career." **L&L**



Orlando Chavez, far right, works on a community service project with Lauren Barber, far left; Brandon Barber, second from left; and Bill Moore, third from left.



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**CARLOS GARCIA** • LANDSCAPE ELEMENTS ND  
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**He isn't 30 years old yet,**  
but that hasn't stopped  
Carlos Garcia from getting  
close to his goal at  
Landscape Elements ND.

**By Brian Horn**

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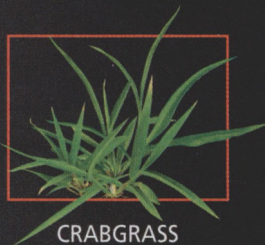


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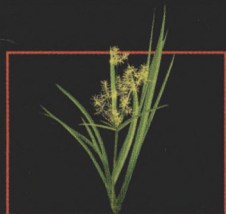
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**“Carlos is one  
of the two vendors  
that I have kept  
from day one  
that had been  
on the property.  
His landscaping,  
it surpasses  
anybody else here  
in Wellington.”**

Sherry Thompson,  
community manager,  
at Regency Apartment Homes

**H**e admits he doesn't take orders well. Maybe that's been a main driving force behind Carlos Garcia's climb of the ladder at Landscape Elements ND in Williston, North Dakota. "So, I've always shot for a higher position," Garcia says.

It doesn't come from arrogance either. Garcia is just a proactive, driven individual who wants to make those around him better. "Carlos is the type of person you want your company to grow with," says Office Manager, Diana Gomez, who nominated Garcia. "He's a great person to be around and truly someone who, at a young age, has taken full advantage of his opportunities to make the best version of himself."

Garcia, operations manager and director of sales, joined Landscape Elements, which his uncle owns, in 2013 as a maintenance manager. He got the landscaping bug helping at the lawn care company his dad, who also works at Landscape Elements, started. "Honestly, this turned into my life," he says. "I like seeing landscapes be created. I like seeing lawns being taken care of. It's just something I fell in love with to be honest with you."

**AGE IS JUST A NUMBER.** At 27, Garcia isn't a kid anymore, but he's still young to be in a leadership position. At 18, he worked in an oil field and was supervising workers in their 40s and 50s.

"I was already leading my own crew, bagging sand and doing some other operations in a yard," he says. "Prior to that I was working for another company and I was also maintenance supervisor. So, I've always had like a position higher up."

He says older workers could be tough on him in the beginning, but it comes down to leading by example and results speak for themselves.

"Once they see that you're actually talented at what you're doing, and you actually have enough work for them, and they see that everything is running smooth and there's no problems, then they respect you," he says. "I believe that age doesn't matter after that."

A driven attitude like Garcia has, where he doesn't like being told what to do, could come off as abrasive. But Garcia says he didn't want to step on toes to show his interest promotions, rather just let his work do the talking.

"If there are higher ups, they would see what I was capable of," he says. "I wasn't being sneaky or being a brown noser or anything. I would just let my work define who I was. I think that's why I would always get early on opportunities and good positions because of the way I would work."

And it's the finished product that has earned him praise from customers. Landscape Elements was already on the job when Sherry Thompson took over as community manager at Regency Apartment Homes.

"Carlos is one of the two vendors that I have kept from day one that had been on the property," she says. "The rest of them I pretty well got rid of them. His landscaping, it surpasses anybody else here in Wellington. You can always look around the town and you can tell which properties are his."

But Garcia really showed his true colors when there was an issue with Thompson's property. Last year she noticed some of the shrubs on her property weren't up to par, so she called Garcia at night to let him know.

"When I came in at nine o'clock, they were already out there and they were already working on the shrubs," she says. "And that's the only time that I've ever had to have him come back and just touch up and redo something."

**THE RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS.** Beyond hard work, listening is another skill Garcia has, which helped him make a crucial change at the company. Employees used to



work on all types of jobs from pavers to irrigation to landscaping.

"People were always complaining," he says. "They were always telling me that they hated to do this, and they hated doing that; they didn't like to lift the heavy pavers, or they didn't like to mow grass."

So, he took three workers who liked paver work, teamed them up with someone who was good at paver work, and formed a crew. He took that approach for every employee and accommodated as best he could.

"I asked the employees what they want to learn, what they feel comfortable with, where they're happy, and that's the crews we formed," he says. "Obviously, they have good crew leaders and they can learn what they actually want to there. I have happier employees and they do work a lot faster. I haven't had any issues with any of my employees probably in the last two years."

If someone wants to be on a crew, but there isn't room or they aren't good enough, Garcia will still give them a chance.

"It all depends on timing and it also depends on how much work I have," he says. "If it's pretty slow or I have really good people in that crew and all my other crews are filled and this guy wants to move to another crew to learn something new, I don't have a problem moving them up to the other crews so they can actually learn. Because if somebody actually wants to learn something, you'd be surprised how fast they can."

Creating that relationship with an employee will create great results, Garcia says.

"Once you listen to an employee and see what they really want or what they're interested in learning, they're usually giving 150%, especially because they don't want to fall behind because they're already with the crew that already knows what they're doing."

Gomez says that attitude has created an easier, more communicative environment.

"He listens to every employee with gratitude and gives them all the same respect," she says. "He truly believes a company runs smoothly by having employees who are happy to attend their jobs as well as complete their job duties. Thankfully, he's had that experi-

ence. Thanks to him, the company has been increasing in profit and revenue year by year."

If Garcia keeps helping the company grow like he has, the dislike for taking orders might

not be an issue in future plans, as he hopes to take the company over from his uncle one day.

I've always wanted to run my own company," he says. "That's the goal." L&L



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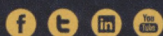


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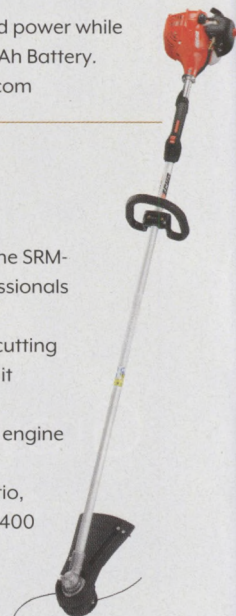
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# RUNNING YEAR-ROUND

Compact tractors can fill a lot of needs for a landscape contractor across all seasons. **By Brian Horn**

**I**f there is one word to describe compact tractors, “versatile” would have to be the winner.

“They offer great flexibility in what you do and how you do it,” says Kelcey Cockrell, product manager for Kubota’s BX, B, L, & MX Series.

“Skid-steers do a good job, but they are not as versatile or as easy to use, especially for a new owner. Not to mention that both the skid-steer and the implements for the skid-steers tend to be more expensive when compared to a compact tractor.”

Along with a price advantage for implements, the amount that can be used with a compact tractor is attractive.

“The compatibility with a variety of implements creates a do-it-all machine that can cut, dig, haul, trench and more,” says Joel Hicks, senior product support manager at Kioti.

Compact tractors can be smaller and lighter than some of the alternative solutions, making more room on a trailer for other equipment, says Jon Friess, product specialist at Steiner.

“Trailer ratings and driver license requirements may also be lower, which can be advantageous,” he says. “Less weight and size can also help when a compact tractor is properly equipped to minimize ground disturbance, reduce risk of turf damage or function in soft conditions.”

Ray Gherardini, product marketing at John Deere, describes a compact tractor as a “true workhorse” with the use of implements.

“For design/build jobs, loader and backhoe implements can be used to carry objects, dig underground, or move large amounts of soil and other materials,” he says.

The machines can help maintenance contractors when equipped with mowers and rotary cutters, and also come in handy when the snow starts to fall.

“In winter months, blades, blowers, snow pushers and brooms help keep grounds clear in the heaviest of snow,”

Gherardini says. “The true benefit of a compact utility tractor is the ability to tackle a variety of jobs in any season.”

**WHAT’S TRENDING.** Angie Ryan, who is the compact tractor marketing manager at Bobcat, says she has seen the development priority of these machines move slowly from function to comfort. Changes like automatically connecting front end loaders and mid-mowers, to the popularity increase of quick connection three-point hitches, prove that landscapers are willing to pay for convenience.

“The compact tractor market is a mature one but there are still signs of innovation to keep the competition fresh,” Ryan says.

Cockrell says a trend she’s seen developing is the tread type within tire offerings. “One of the newest tread types to the market is an agriculture/turf/industrial crossover (R14T) which provides both a smooth ride with less ground pressure than ag or industrial tires, as well as the traction needed in snow, ice or muddy applications,” she says.

Hicks says contractors want more power in smaller frames because it allows landscapers “a wider array of options to use larger attachments in smaller areas therefore allowing them to do more tasks across their properties.”

Ryan adds that one element that hasn’t changed that much is the powertrain. “There are a variety of options out there for transmission but ever since the introduction of the hydrostatic drive system it seems that things have slowed a bit likely due to the incredible cost of the Tier 4 engine transition,” she says.

Friess says demand for compact tractors has been on the rise, especially as the benefits become better understood.

He adds that when a company doesn’t have enough money in the budget for multiple pieces of equipment, it’s important to assess for need.

“For example, if a wheel loader with limited attach-



#### KEEPING PACE:

Manufacturers have been updating compact tractors to meet landscapers’ needs.





**Angie Ryan,**  
Compact Tractor  
Marketing Manager,  
Bobcat



**Joel Hicks,**  
Senior Product  
Support Manager,  
Kioti



**Kelcey Cockrell,**  
Product Manager,  
Kubota



**Jon Friess,**  
Product Specialist,  
Steiner

ment options and limited slope capabilities is needed 20% of the time, and a compact tractor with a host of attachments and the ability to work on turf or steeper slopes can be utilized 70% of the time, it would make sense to buy or lease the compact tractor and rent the loader as needed," he says.

**MISSED OPPORTUNITIES.** With the compact tractor's variety of ways to be used, that increases the chances contractors aren't getting the most out of the machine like maximizing the backhoe compatibility.

"A backhoe is worth the investment because it allows the crew to do so much – installing

underground utilities and building ponds or water features to moving heavy materials like rocks, gravel and soil particularly in the tighter areas on a property where a larger backhoe may not be able to access," Hicks says.

Friess adds: "Not everyone realizes how capable compact tractors are when equipped with a landscape rake, but they can grade different types of material such as dirt or stone, or to gather limbs when clearing debris."

Ryan says she often hears buyers wish they would have bought the next size up because of the number of ways the compact tractor can be used. "We would recommend looking at where you want to be in a few years instead of where you are today when researching a new compact tractor," she says. **L&L**



# PATIO PAR



The right outdoor furniture can be the cherry on top of a design/build project. **By Julianne Mobilian**

**A**s hardscape projects come together, including trendy patio furniture in a design or suggesting it to a client can round out your next job.

Executives from three retail garden centers who are successful in selling outdoor furniture talk about the latest trends from that segment of the market.

Jessica Salisbury, CEO and creative di-

rector at Village Green Home & Garden in Rockford, Illinois, says that her IGC started selling patio furniture more than 30 years and hasn't looked back since. In fact, patio furniture makes up 51% of Village Green's business.

Kate Terrell, general manager of Wallace's Garden Center in Bettendorf, Iowa, says Wallace's has sold outdoor furniture for nearly 20 years and it contributes to a decent chunk of

profits. "Last year, I think it was probably 10-15% (of profits), which sounds low, but when you add in all those accessory pieces, it's really a big part of our center and it's a big part of our merchandising," she says.

Similarly, AJ Petitti, president of Petitti Garden Centers in Cleveland, says they have been selling patio furniture for more than 15 years and about 10% of their sales come from this category.





**LATEST TRENDS.** Salisbury says the latest trends she's noticed are that customers are drawn to neutral tones while accessories provide pops of color. "Pillows, rugs, pottery – that's where they're drawing in all of the color, but the base fabric on a lot of the furniture is still in that neutral tone," she says.

Petitti also says that neutral tones are popular with consumers. "Traditional pieces do really well, and accent pillows are still going

really strong," he says. "Cantilever umbrellas have really been picking up steam, too."

Terrell notes that there is an uptick of sales from furniture made of recycled plastics. People like the fact that it's made from post-consumer recyclables and, while it is expensive, the materials are durable and weather resistant. Terrell says they've experienced a resurgence in natural materials too, such as eucalyptus and teak.

"A lot of people lose their price resistance once they realize, 'Oh my gosh, I can sit this on my deck and never move it again,'" Terrell says.

Traditionally, Wallace's best-selling colors are neutral slate gray, chocolate or lighter neutral shades in between. However, a lot of people shy away from white because of the dirt, Terrell says. People with swimming pools tend to buy bright-colored pub set chairs to go around the pool and offering tropical colors like lime green or turquoise are a good way to cater to those people, she says.

Both Salisbury and Terrell agree that fire pits are huge sellers in the Midwest, as they help extend the seasons because consumers use them earlier in the spring and later on in the fall.

"People are doing outdoor seating groups, whether it's sofas, sectionals, chat groups," Salisbury says. "It's about cocktailing and conversations and having fun, and that's usually done around a fire pit."

**PRICE POINTS.** Offering products at various prices can help all budgets.

"We offer everything for every pocketbook. We offer an opening price point, which for us – for like a dining set – would be \$1,000. And then our most expensive set is \$15,000. That sweet spot is the middle price range, that \$2,500 to \$3,000 price," Salisbury says.

At Petitti, they offer selections between \$999 and \$7,999 and try not to stray from those points.

For a long time, Terrell says they tried to stick in the middle price points, but they had a hard time doing so.

She says their real wood or recycled plastic furniture tends to be on the high end of the price point, while their outdoor interiors tend to be middle-of-the-road. They also offer low price point options such as benches.

"When we would kind of sacrifice quality for cheaper price points, we personally had a hard time selling it to people because there's a lot of middle of the road out there in the market," Terrell says. **L&L**

The author is an assistant editor with Garden Center magazine, a sister publication of Lawn & Landscape.



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**For more info:** [Hunter.direct/oe](http://Hunter.direct/oe)



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- Programming is simple, as users can simply select set points, program the irrigation modes and save them as default settings. Plus, the battery is long-lasting but easy to replace when needed.
- The easy-to-install sensor brackets can be hooked up to flat surfaces and rain gutters, and the antennas on the device are concealed.

**For more info:** [Rainbird.com](http://Rainbird.com)



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- The sensors are compatible with most manufacturers, so users can enhance their existing irrigation systems with the K-Rain products.
- The model, 3208-UWRFS, is the latest K-Rain rain sensor and will easily pair with the other sensors in K-Rain's lineup.

**For more info:** [Krain.com](http://Krain.com)





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# cleaner service

Purple Care in Texas started offering sanitization services after COVID-19 first became prominent.

By Jimmy Miller

**W**hen his company first started sanitizing homes, Justin Berg says he immediately realized the powerful effect of helping during the COVID-19 crisis.

A man contacted the Texas-based Purple Care, which provides landscaping and pest control services, about sanitizing his mother's home. She had recently died from the novel coronavirus, and he needed to retrieve belongings from her house and find closure after her death. Berg sent his director of pest control and a technician, who quickly got certified in the state of Texas by completing two classes on sanitization.

"When someone passes, there's a lot of paperwork and it's also very painful to go through emotionally," he says. "The guy was able to go back into a house he did not feel safe or comfortable going back in. This poor guy needs closure, he just lost his mother. We're not trying to prey on that (with our sales), but I'm glad that we could help this guy get him back in that house."

Through moving swiftly and making sure his team was ready, Berg says they've been able to implement a sanitizing service at Purple Care that's already garnered a handful of clients.

"The way we're looking at this is, if we can help people, fantastic," Berg says. "It's more of what can we do, this is our piece, how can we help?"

**THE PROCESS.** Berg says the day after Texas started announcing coronavirus-related safety measures in March, his team started asking how they were going to handle it. Berg says that though they were down in March revenue, he had enough work to "keep our guys busy."

"I'm also not going to complain because a lot of guys out there are doing (zero dollars)," he says. "By no means is it normal, but we're at least doing some business. I'm taking the blessings as I can, and I know there's a lot of people out there worse off than us."



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“When this COVID-19 thing is over, we will continue to offer this.”

JUSTIN BERG, Purple Care

Berg says his returning services were largely put on pause because clients were unsure what was going to happen with their income, and services that Berg says are somewhat luxuries like weed control and pest control all fell. Their salesmen could also no longer go door-to-door, which represents a big chunk of Purple Care's sales.

But Berg's team saw an opportunity to help, plus lessen the blow his company would take from the COVID-19 fallout. They already had much of the necessary equipment – face shields, respirators and gloves – because Purple Care offers pest control. The company also already had hand-held, point-and-spray devices that could be repurposed with disinfectant that is non-toxic and can be applied on any surface.

All they needed was disposable paper

hazmat suits and to get the proper licensure from the state. He says the requirements vary from state to state, so checking to ensure a company meets that state's respective guidelines is a must.

“For some of these states, the limitations are very minimal. The question is going to be, do you have the equipment?” Berg says.

**BIG DECISIONS.** Berg says that any interested companies have to determine if they want to send their crews out there in situations where they could be exposed.

“That should be the number one thing you're looking for,” he says. “Why would I want to put my guys in harm's way to add to my bottom line? The two things you've got to worry about are safety for your people and safety for your clients.”

They dispose of the suits each night and sanitize themselves, plus the equipment, after every stop. Berg says he doesn't want to risk his crews bringing COVID-19 into someone else's home, and he reminds anyone interested in sanitization that you never really know where the germs exist.

Though it's only been offered for a month, Berg says he wishes his team would've jumped on this service sooner. COVID-19 could rage on for the foreseeable future, but Berg says Purple Care will continue to offer it long after the chaos settles because there will always be work that needs done.

“There's some disease and bacteria that are very bad that need to be sanitized, so now we're going to have a service. When this COVID-19 thing is over, we will continue to offer this. We want to be able to help.” **L&L**



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# A SPRING LIKE NO OTHER

ONE TURNAROUND TOUR COMPANY GOT HIT HARD BY COVID-19, WHILE THE OTHERS HAVE STAYED HEALTHY.



## TOUGHING IT OUT

BY KIM LUX

**F**runk Leloia and the crew at Custom Landscaping and Lawn Care are pulling themselves out of the trenches.

The coronavirus pandemic has hit the New Jersey-based business hard, with multiple employees contracting the virus.

"It's been really challenging," Leloia says. "We have had 19 cases of the virus. Of those 19 people, only five had symptoms."

Leloia says that so many workers got sick despite the company adhering to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's guidelines.

"We are making sure trucks, machines and equipment is sanitized on a daily basis. We staggered start times, we are wearing masks and gloves," he says. "We started implementing taking temperatures; however, out of our 19 cases, nobody has had a fever."

Leloia estimates that around 75% of the company has been tested for COVID-19.

Leloia says having so many employees out has made it difficult to keep up with the workload.

"It presented a lot of challenges, but we were able to work through them," he says. "We've been working seven days a week, and 80 hours weeks."

Even through it all, Leloia says Custom Landscaping and Lawn Care hasn't had an

increase in cancellations, but not a lot of new work either.

"Maintenance is still thriving," he says. "We're not seeing the bigger, more expensive jobs coming through the way that we'd expect them to, but we've been managing to keep up."

Leloia and the Harvesters were also working to improve human resources.

"All of our focus HR-wise has been tracking the virus, what to do if somebody doesn't feel good, how long to keep them out and those type of things," he says.

Leloia says he hopes things will continue to improve.

"We're trying to figure it out as we go, like everybody else," he says. "We've got to make sure the work is done and it's as safe as possible for employees as well as our customers. I'd like to think, optimistically, that the worst is over."

### HARVESTERS' TAKE.

As you can imagine (the COVID-19 cases) threw his operation into a tailspin. Not only did he lose the 12 crew members but those that worked with them. At one point, 40% of his operations were shut down. The result: All in his company rallied. They worked 12-hour shifts and seven days a week to care for their customers. In early May, those infected



Frank Leloia Jr., left, says 19 of his employees tested positive for COVID-19.

employees are returning to work. None were hospitalized and they are all well.

Sales are up over last year. Larger enhancement sales are down, but all in all, financially they are having a good year.

Frank reported that they received their PPP money but is leery if he will in fact be able to keep it.

As for the future, the next 90 days look better and better every day. So far, there doesn't seem to be any long-term effects going into the fall.

Looks like customer lawn care is doing well despite their setbacks. As a matter of fact, they are looking for a business developer that can help grow their commercial department going forward. ☺

## SELL, SELL, SELL

BY BRIAN HORN

**T**he team at Lawn & Pest Solutions in Mississippi has been busy. Owner Paul Welborn and company beat its production goal for April by 17% and new sales are about 5% ahead of 2019 levels. However, Welborn

says they budgeted for a substantial increase in new sales but that hasn't materialized yet.

If the COVID-19 restrictions on social distancing relax without increased health concerns, he expects to see at least a portion of the increased budget come through.

A company sales challenge to add termite services has been going great because technicians have embraced the upsell opportunities.

The company normally pays technicians \$30 for each referral that leads to a sale, but have expanded it for the sales challenge. For the sales, Lawn & Pest Solutions is tracking referrals whether they lead to a sale or not and offering prizes for the technicians that get the most referrals each month and then a larger prize at the end for the overall leader.



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"One of the pest techs told me the other day, 'I'm not going to let the other guys beat me,' which tells me he's having fun with the challenge we laid out for them," he says. "Our techs are already good at talking with customers, so we educated the techs on the big talking points about termites so they could increase awareness. We increased termite sales 100% over last April."

Two new hires have been able to get started on the newly implemented career ladder, but it has somewhat been impeded due to COVID-19.

"A major component of the career ladder for the more experienced employees involves tests within some software," he says. "With the social distancing and our isolation policies, we have not implemented that portion as well. So, we are a little off track from where I had planned to be year-to-date."

Welborn is also monitoring the numbers more closely while rolling out a new budgeting system and chart of accounts to better watch gross margins and cost of goods sold. Welborn meets with his operations manager and office manager each Wednesday to look at year to date and month to date numbers.

"(We've) discussed worst case scenarios if sales do not materialize as we had budgeted," he says. "Bill (Arman) stressed importance of watching sales week to week and me stepping in as owner to assist closing big sales."

#### HARVESTERS' TAKE.

Paul's company is fortunate because they have not experienced any COVID-19 cases. He did, however, close his office as recommended by the state of Mississippi and followed all of the CDC guidelines with their crews and equipment. His managers and office people have been for the most part working from their homes.

Regarding sales, so far inbound leads have sustained them but not at the growth rate they expected. They are 5% higher than last year at this same time but that is not enough to support their budgeted growth. They have gotten some new jobs, one of which was particularly good in renovating a sports field. One thing they also tried was having a sales contest among their technicians. This was very successful and they loved the competition.

In order to accomplish the higher budgeted sales, they brought on a business developer but he has been struggling. This particular sales professional is excellent at person-to-person sales, but we all know what happened there. Paul is still optimistic that during the late summer and fall he will again be able to meet people and make the sales they need.

All in all, their financials are okay with gross margins running between 50-60% as budgeted. They also got their PPP money and are tracking it carefully with the hopes of having the loan forgiven. Paul is watching the numbers very closely as we requested and hopes the economy bounces back. ☺

Three companies won a year's worth of consulting with Bill Arman and Ed Laflamme from the Harvest Group. **For more Turnaround Tour coverage, [bit.ly/lawntour](https://bit.ly/lawntour).**



David Hawkins Jr., left, with his son David Hawkins III, right, says he has more time to dedicate to each job as the company navigates the COVID-19 pandemic.

## A DIFFERENT SPRING RUSH


BY JIMMY MILLER

**D**avid Hawkins Jr., says the annual frenzy of new jobs is slower this year, but his company, Hawkins Landscaping, is managing the COVID-19 crisis as best they can.

First, it's certainly true that they don't have as many lawns to maintain at this time, but Hawkins says that it's easier to deal with the usual stressors that accompany every spring. They have more time to spend at each site and have a better work-life balance for the 26 employees at the company. Plus, Hawkins says he can use everyone staying at home to his advantage. He pitches his services as creating a "staycation" environment and tells them it's something they'll always have. Plus, for customers looking to buy into a design/build project, Hawkins reminds them that the interest paid on certain home improvements are a tax write-off.

"It's made (our work) more in their face. They're there every day now," Hawkins says. "In a way, it's just like anything else – one door closes, another one opens."








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Of course, Hawkins Landscaping is not immune to the pressures of COVID-19. Among other things, some of Hawkins' primary goals once he was selected for the Turnaround Tour have taken a backseat to putting out daily fires he didn't anticipate would happen this year. Hawkins and his son, David Hawkins III, have had preliminary conversations with their insurance company as they discuss a transition plan so Hawkins Jr. can retire, and Hawkins III can lead the company.

Hawkins' employees are still doing physical appointments and keep their distance. Hawkins recalled one weekend where he went on a jobsite and explained their services to a potential client in person because nothing beats face-to-face communication, he says. He jokingly calls email electronic volleyball, and apparently, his client agreed. Despite having lower bids, the client liked that Hawkins came out to educate them and signed on for his business. He recommends other companies simply be smart about how to handle everyone's perspectives on COVID-19.

"When we go there, if they have their mask on, I put my mask on. A lot of people are really appreciative of that," he says. "Like everything else, you have to be an opportunist. You have to have a little nerve and take a chance on it."

Hawkins is also reexamining his pricing with the Harvesters. For example, they offer clients a 10% discount if they offer their whole hardscaping job to Hawkins, but the Harvesters pointed out that there's a good chunk of possible money being left on the table as a result. "But sometimes, you've got to keep the guys busy," Hawkins says. "So, we're working through that now."

### HARVESTER'S TAKE

Overall, the Hawkins team is doing good. Sales are up over last year at this time and net profit is up \$50,000. The only sales that were down were from a slow snow season. They are still close to meet their sales goals for 2020 at \$2.2 million in sales.

They have had little effect from the virus issue and have received their PPP money. Their focus remains on the residential market with installs and maintenance.

Their install backlog is at four weeks and pricing seems to be pretty competitive. They have also been getting some new sales from posting completed jobs on Facebook.

Moving forward over the next several months, they are focusing on four areas:

- **Get testimonials from existing satisfied customers:** The Harvesters have coached them up on these and given them a step-by-step method to get great testimonials.
- **Marketing and advertising:** Harvester Ed is assisting here by using Facebook, testimonials and "safe distancing" six feet face-to-face meetings with customers.
- **Cost tracking:** Production manager Carol Hawkins will track labor and material costs and will be adding this to the mini budget program.
- **Getting more efficient:** We want to get really close to the installation process and see where we can get more efficient, especially if they are giving 10% discounts! (◡\_◡)





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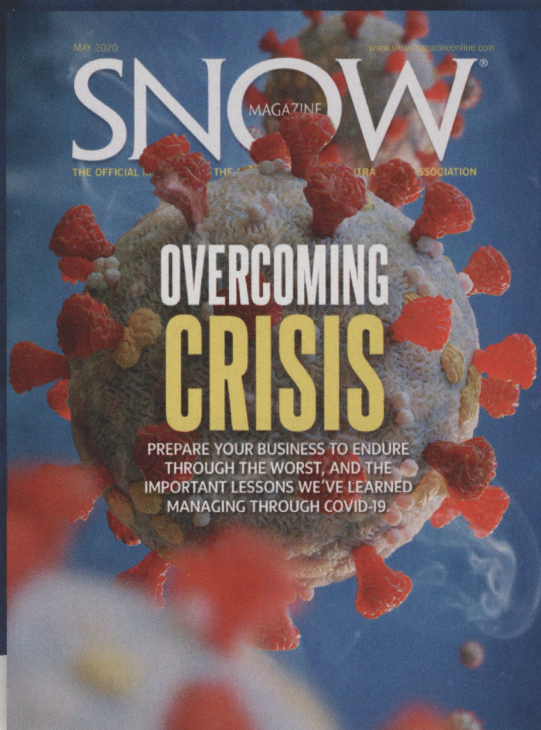


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## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

# Nathan James

### STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

brings you the perspectives of horticulture students and insights into the future of the industry.

By Kim Lux



### Nathan James has always had a love of the outdoors.

"Since I was very young, I've been very interested in plants and nature in general," he says. "Especially from living in west Michigan."

James says he was introduced to the green industry early on in life.

"A few family friends introduced me to the horticultural and greenhouse industries," he says. "They worked on living walls and living roofs, which were really unique. They also worked with me to find sustainable methods to help the community."

James, 20, is now pursuing an Associate of Applied Science degree in fruit and vegetable crop management at Michigan State University's Institute of Agricultural Technology.

"It was tough to decide where to start with college," he says. "Working with MSU has introduced me to a lot of different aspects of the industry."

Through his studies, James' interests have continued to blossom. He has enjoyed learning about nursery management, food science, conservation, plant pathology and entomology.

"I've always been pretty interested in conservation," James says. "It's been another outlet to help me understand our surroundings and the natural benefits of the world around us."

Being a student at MSU has also given James the opportunity to volunteer.

Most recently, he participated in an Alternative Spartan Breaks service trip to Loggerhead Marinelife Center in Juno Beach, Florida, in March 2020.

"With a couple of other Michigan State students, I helped find ways to reduce the impact humans have on the ecosystems in Florida," he says. "We also stained the pier, planned for destructive weather, did beach cleanups and more."

James adds he also enjoys volunteering with the Michigan Natural Association.

"We've preserved different nature sanctuaries and ecosystems," he says. "We also learn ways to reduce environmental abuse."

James has also worked to eliminate invasive species and establish barriers to environmental abuse with MNA.

While James, a sophomore, is keeping his career aspirations open for now, he had the opportunity to intern with Hortech in Nunica, Michigan, last summer.

"I worked with them for three summers, and was most recently an intern," he says. "As an intern, I worked in three departments where I got to know each plant they specialize in. I learned how to care of all of them."

While interning, James was also responsible for fertilizing plant beds, applying lime to assist in plant growth, performing pest management and analyzing products for potential disease. He also got a chance to get back to one of his early interests – living roofs and living walls.

"I took care of weed management, mulching and helped design some of the walls," he says.

James says he isn't sure exactly what he wants to do in the industry but insists sustainability and conservation will be at the forefront of it. He is eager to see what the future holds.

"I just want to find sustainable ways to help everybody," he says. **L&L**





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“Could you find (a chief technology officer) in another industry and bring them over? Yeah, probably so, but I think you’re well ahead of the game if you get someone who understands the industry and the business.”

**Janet Davoli**, chief technology officer, The Greenery

## **THE RIGHT APPROACH**

Three companies discuss how they are  
integrating technology in their companies.

By Brian Horn



## Tech's in the title

**C**hief technology officers may be rare in the green industry, but that could be in title only. Companies have employees completing the tasks of the position but without the CTO label.

That was the case with Janet Davoli while serving as director of business development at The Greenery in South Carolina.

Davoli had been performing the duties of a CTO at the company before she officially had the title in September of last year. She says the title may be overwhelming for some because it may also bring along with it a leadership component.

"You could probably find a really great account manager who also loves technology and they're managing a lot of this stuff for you," she says. "It's hard to find the person who can then make the leap to the next level of leadership."

While the duties of a CTO will vary from

company to company, she says a sole CTO will not have IT duties, such as running a network or dealing with hardware. Those are the responsibilities of a chief information officer, while the CTO sticks to investigating new technologies to support operations.

"A chief technology officer typically is more outward, looking toward clients where you're looking at what new products are out there, be it battery operated, be it auto mowers," she says, adding the interaction with the operations side of the business is a differentiator between a CTO and a CIO.

"The person who's going to do your networking isn't really the same person who's going to be really engaged with operations, looking at auto mowers, doing demos, seeking the feedback from the field. You have to have a different personality for that."

Davoli says the industry has been slow to adapt to technology but is catching up.

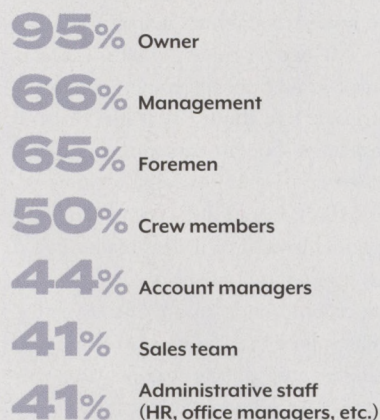
Once a company does start investing in better technology, she says to take it slow. The Greenery took that approach when rolling out autonomous mowers, starting out with just one when they started two years ago and have 15 deployed now.

"There's always going to be problems you don't know exist until they hit," she says. "If it's rolled out really quickly, you have to react all over the place. So, we're sometimes slow to implement because we're feeling it out. And then once we'll feel comfortable, then we ramp up faster."

She adds if you are looking for a CTO, experience in the landscaping industry isn't a must, but it is finding one with landscaping experience is a major advantage.

"It's good to have a good strong operations understanding of landscaping," she says. "Could you find someone in technology in another industry and bring them over? Yeah, probably so, but I think you're well ahead of the game if you get someone who understands the industry and the business."

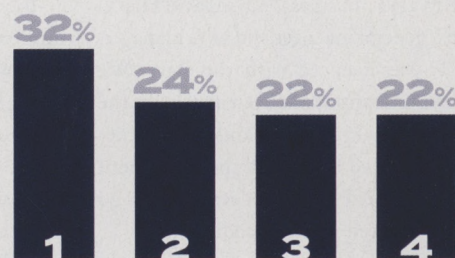
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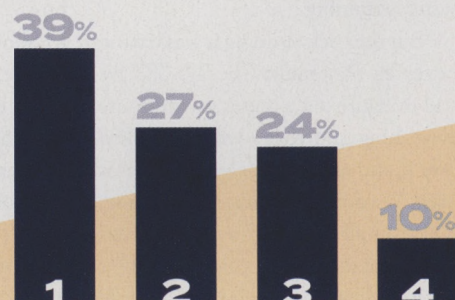
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### How would you describe your company's use of technology and software compared to your competition?

1. In line with my competition
2. Behind but catching up
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4. Behind and staying that way







**“Not having time is an excuse; not a problem. Because you’re just putting your time somewhere else.”**

**David Hartzell, general manager and sales manager, Best Property Maintenance Services**

## After the storm

**I**t only took a catastrophic natural disaster for Best Property Maintenance Services to finally start using the technology it purchased.

The year was 2012 and Hurricane Sandy devastated the East Coast, leaving many without power and plenty to clean up. Wanting to avoid the bidding wars of clean-up work, the company added a mold and remediation service.

“Our office was actually shut down for two weeks with no power, but by the time the power came back on, we had a new business,” says David Hartzell, general manager and sales manager. “It was licensed with the state. We had rewrapped half our trucks in the company to be flood and mold remediation and bought all the equipment and trained all our salespeople to go out and sell mold remediation.”

As part of the service, workers would have to go from property to property with gas cans and make sure generators and pumps had fuel to keep the drying systems running.

“But the trick to doing it was having extremely tight routes,” he says. “So, we had to figure out a better way to route everything and that’s when I looked into it and realized this system does it itself. We don’t have to route anything. It does it all itself and we didn’t even know that it had a routing module.”

Hartzell says he didn’t become more

educated on the software before Hurricane Sandy because he didn’t make time for it.

“Not having time is an excuse; not a problem,” he says. “Because you’re just putting your time somewhere else.”

Now, Hartzell makes time every day to stay updated on the technologies the company is using.

“I probably spend on average two to three hours a day just going over training modules, online videos, online tutorials for things we do and that we want to go doing forward to stay abreast of it.”

The company is currently trying to improve its SEO and has brought an employee in house to specialize on that.

He now needs to become educated on SEO so he knows what that employee is talking about. He says those who are afraid to invest heavily in technology shouldn’t be afraid of spending the money.

“It’s not as complicated as you think,” he says. “It will save you a tremendous amount of time and does not matter how expensive it is. If it’s the right technology, it will pay for itself.”

The company sold the mold and remediation arm in 2015, but Hartzell says that year could have been a lot different if not for adding it and using technology to succeed.

“We would have probably been going out of business in 2015 instead if we hadn’t done that,” he says.

## Well equipped

**I**t was mid-May and the forecast in Pennsylvania was calling for rain and, yes, snow the next day. So, Brian Cuccaro, vice president at New Castle Lawn & Landscape, hopped on his phone and through the app of New Castle software provider dispatched crews that finished early to properties other crews wouldn’t be able to get to because of the unseasonable rain/snow mix.

“From the job site that I’m at, I went onto my phone, went into the software that we use, which is web based, and I was able to find the job and dispatch it to the crews. That updates on their iPad,” he says

Four years ago, before the company invested in iPads for crews, that would have been a more difficult and less efficient process. Today, it was the click of a button and Cuccaro was back to what he was working on.

Instead of buying iPads new at a store where you may have to sign up for that provider’s service, Cuccaro buys them used on eBay.

“Then we can just add them to our plan without committing to a new contract,” he says.

He estimates the company spent about \$4,000 on the equipment and the data plan is about \$15 a month per unit.

Prior to the COVID-19 protocols, the iPads were returned to the office each night and charged.

“But this year, because of the social distancing, we don’t have the guys coming into the office. We have them keeping the devices in the trucks in the holders overnight,” he says, adding that the trucks are parked in the company’s secure lot.

Cuccaro says each iPad has a strong case for protection, but two to three a year still break, which is not docked from the employee’s pay.

The company has about 30 iPads, but not everyone has them. Cuccaro says some employees prefer to use their phones instead of toggling between two devices. He adds the company didn’t invest in phones instead of iPads because they’d have to buy a voice and data plan.

Cuccaro recommends to anyone investing in iPads that will be used in trucks to invest in adequate, higher amp vehicle chargers.

“Regular iPhone chargers will not always work with iPads,” he says, adding that Generation 1 iPads are outdated so he recommends buying Generation 3 or newer. **L&L**



# tackling **TECH**

Timberline Landscaping has been able to grow its business year after year by utilizing SEO and other technology.

**By Kim Lux**

Stephanie Early, chief of strategy at Timberline Landscaping, says the company has focused on SEO since she started seven years ago.





Timberline Landscaping has always embraced technology. They instituted mobile timekeeping about 10 years ago.

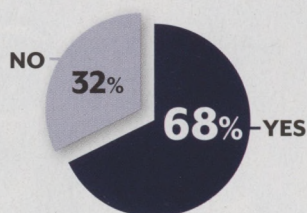
**S**tephanie Early, chief of strategy with Timberline Landscaping in Colorado Springs, says technology has always been an important element of the business and something they still focus on growing.

"Timberline has been an early adopter of technology for quite some time," she says. "We began mobile timekeeping almost 10 years ago. And, from what we've seen, we were one of the first companies to really dive into that. We've had mobile timekeeping, GPS, estimating software systems and accounting for many, many years."

**KNOW SEO.** Search Engine Optimization (SEO) is a crucial component of Timberline's technology use. Early says she works with Timberline's marketing coordinator to develop SEO and keyword research into the company's strategy.

"I've been with the company for seven years and we've had an SEO focus since that point," Early says. "We have continually worked on that. What I love is that we're at the point now that we are continually ranking well organically for most of the search terms that we want.

## Can customers pay for your services online?



Early says Timberline, which has slightly more than 200 employees, targets a mix of short-tail and long-tail keywords. Examples of short-tail keywords would include "landscaping" or "lawn care," and a long-tail keyword would be something along the lines of "Should I mow my lawn in the winter?"

She also suggests incorporating keywords into the title, image alt. text and headers of a post.

According to Early, ranking well in terms of SEO has boosted Timberline's business.

"We've been able to create this free, organic pipeline of work, just based on search results, that is feeding a whole lot of business our way," she says. "We measure our sales by marketing sources and internet search is our number three, just underneath current customers and referrals."

Early attributes the company's ranking to an aggressive in-bound marketing approach.

"Outbound is your cold calls, mailers and things of that nature," she says. "In-bound is about creating content that people are already searching for and having that available on your site and giving them the opportunity to convert from there."

Timberline's website features blog posts and other gated content, where users must provide an email address to access it. Early says this content is rich in SEO keywords.

"When people sit down to do keyword research, they say, 'Well I think people are searching this way.' We actually plug it into a software and determine exactly how people are searching for each service and seeing what words they are using so we can make sure we are making our content rich in those keywords," she says.

Early says the company determines the keywords internally but uses the software to determine which to go after. When choosing an SEO software, she suggests "looking for something that allows you to track performance analytics and plays nice with Google analytics and social media. Keyword traffic and ranking difficulty are great tools to have."



It's been an effective approach for Timberline, and Early says traffic to the website continues to increase.

"Our website traffic continues to rise year over year, every year," she says.

Early adds there is one annual post that drives a large amount of traffic to the website every year.

"We do Christmas lighting as a service over the winter, so we prepare a Christmas lights map of the local area where people submit their house," she says. "And that map drives 65,000 people in the month of December to our website. That amount of traffic helps our website authority for the rest of the year."

The Christmas lights map, which you can view at [bit.ly/xmaslawn](http://bit.ly/xmaslawn), also keeps users on the web page for a while, which Early notes is important for improving SEO.

"On average, people are spending five minutes per unique view on that Christmas lights map," she says.

**COMBINE COMPONENTS.** Early says the company recently purchased a new business management software to help consolidate all the technology they were using in hopes of streamlining operations.

"We found we were limited by our estimating, job costing and CRM system," she says. "We were using items that were working decently but weren't cloud-based. We wanted to make sure that all this software was available to our field staff. We wanted to keep things moving quickly without having to come into the office."

The new software, which is designed specifically for landscape companies, has helped Timberline.

"It brought out CRM, estimating, job costing, timekeeping and billing all under one umbrella," she says. "The only things that are still separate are our overhead and our balance sheets and income statements. But there's a bridge to connect those."

Early says getting all the software onto one platform was great, but getting everyone on board with the new software posed a challenge.

"Anytime you move people's cheese, they will struggle a little bit. We had a lot of conversations with our team as we were vetting out new software," she says. "As we were demoing software, we narrowed it down to two and then brought in a lot of our team to watch the demos and learn what was going on. There is a ton of setup that goes into it. People not only have to learn the new software but also adjust their workflows."

Early says Timberline's C-Suite business unit leaders and estimators were all involved in demoing the software options. While no formal vote was taken, a general consensus was made by all parties.

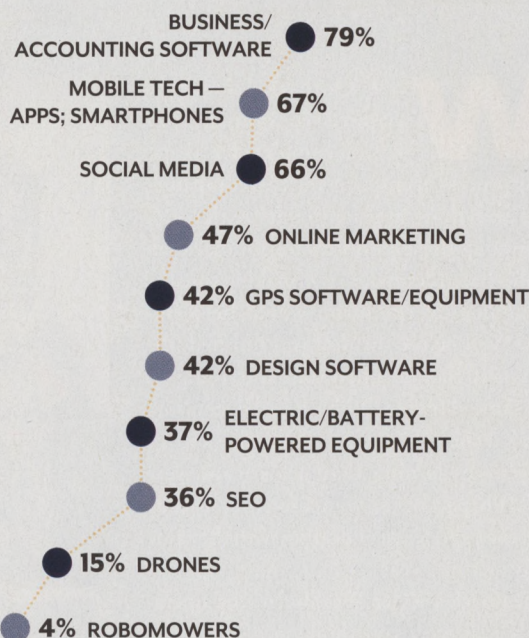
While it might have been difficult early on, Early says everyone is adjusted to it now and sees the benefits of the process.

"We pulled the trigger almost a year ago," she says. "A couple of months in, people were still struggling, but by this point they say they get it and see why we made this change. We had to get used to taking the good, letting go of what we were used to do and just move forward."

To help everyone transition, Early says Timberline took an employee who adapted to the new software early on and used him as a trainer for others.

"(He) helped train our team, setup the system and troubleshoot," she

## Which of the following do you use at your company?



says. "He continues to help us in that role still and we could not have done it without him."

**RESEARCH & REQUEST REFERRALS.** Early says any company looking to implement a new software or technology should make sure they do their homework.

"Make sure you do your due diligence," she says. "Look at multiple options, talk to people who are using the software and take your time with the decision-making process."

Early also suggests getting good, reliable referrals.

"If a company is not willing to give you referrals, then we would likely steer clear," she says. "Those referrals make a huge difference."

While software can be expensive, Early says it can be an investment worth making if it'll improve business operations.

"You're definitely going to have costs associated with these things, but you have to think about that return on investment over time," she says. "For us, it's been worth it." **L&L**



# ON THE OFFENSIVE

Outback Landscape aggressively searches for technology that improves efficiency to help the company grow. **By Jimmy Miller**

**W**hen Outback Landscape acquired a company last fall, it completed a years-long process of ensuring the two companies had everything in place to finalize the deal.

Among those priorities for Outback, an Idaho-based company, was making sure the technological transition would be seamless. Well before the deal was finished, the company they acquired started training on the same software Outback had been using since 2012. This was so that once the 14 employees joining Outback's team were officially part of the company, they already had the experience of dealing with the same software for a year.

Outback's Tyler Washburn, the operations manager, says thinking of efficiency when using technology is a critical step many companies miss. While his company has watched its staff grow from eight employees to 70 in a decade, others find implementing technology is more of a hindrance than a tool for growth.

"We basically wanted to play offense with how we rolled the crews out in the morning rather than defense," he says. "We've been aggressive to see what's the next thing to help us."

**FINDING THE NEXT THING.** First, Washburn cautions landscapers from investing in new technology too quickly. He says nobody wants to wake up a year after buying software – or anything else – and have regrets. Company ownership should be fully committed to a software, he says, and putting in the time to do research on what fits your particular company could save you lots of consternation later.

"Look at what the core of your business this and find something that's going to grow as you grow," Washburn says. In other words, buyers should make sure the new technology will advance their company's missions and can be adapted over time.

For Washburn, they use two separate software providers: one of them is reserved for the company's maintenance division, and another software is for tracking bigger install projects that are primarily estimated by materials.

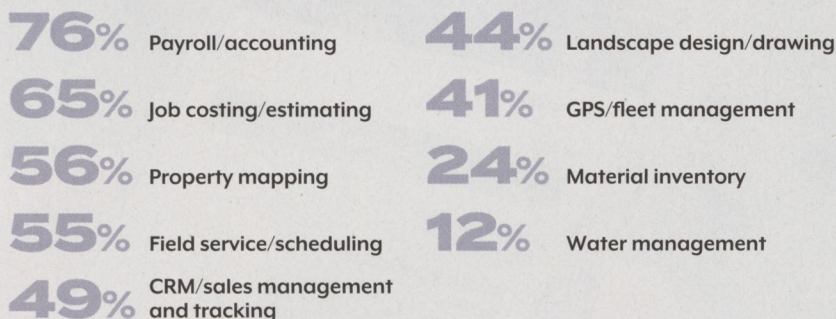


**What was the most effective way of training yourself and your team on software?**

- 33%** In-house training
- 27%** We have never done software training
- 22%** Online courses
- 14%** In-person training from software companies
- 4%** Sending an employee to software training



## What do you use software for in your business? (choose all that apply)



They use the software to send automated notifications to clients on when they might be coming, and they can even use it to upsell certain products or services. Washburn says one of his upselling tactics is to have a marketing email that essentially says something along the lines of, “We’re starting our pruning season and coming to your house soon for regular maintenance. Do you want to also add on our pruning service?”

Internally, the software is also used to track time out in the field and cross-reference it with GPS data. Plus, foremen on the installation crews are supposed to fill out daily, short questionnaires that essentially tell Washburn and management what materials need to be ordered for the next day’s services. And when managers leave the company – and they will leave at some point – the company still has each client’s data stored on the same software.

But what Washburn uses the technology for could be entirely different than how another landscaping company conducts business. He advises buyers to really consider how the technology would actually make their company more efficient. If they can’t come up with a good answer, the technology’s probably not a good fit.

“Implementing (software) has helped us put fires out before they happen, and it has given us the tools to be able to grow,” Washburn says.

**HOW TO APPROACH IT.** Washburn says that “there’s growing pains in everything.” Essentially, he urges landscapers to acknowledge that transitioning to a new technology won’t be easy. He spent countless nights fiddling with the software, testing it out with dummy accounts and entries before finally feeling like he had a good grasp on how it worked.

He recommends handing the technology off to a select team of employees first before implementing company-wide. It can help them fine-tune how to use the technology first and troubleshoot with management as problems arise.

“With rolling it out to the employees and showing them the benefit of it, we started with a small segment of our employees first, ones we knew were sort of tech-savvy,” Washburn says. “Getting a few of those key members on board...was a huge benefit.”

Investing in a consultant is additionally worth “every penny” before finding a software that helps you best, he says. He adds that it’s

prudent to make sure the technology providers are like partners and keep up consistent communicate. Whether it’s general help questions or asking for advice on how to improve the product, Washburn says his company’s relationship with their software providers has helped him tremendously over the years. If anybody ever had any questions, it’s nice to have experts with the technology ready to help.

And speaking of ready to help, Washburn also says it’s easier when someone on staff is specifically in charge of the technology, especially software. Outback Landscape promoted someone within the company already who had worked with the software out in the field to oversee everyone’s use. And as more climb the company’s career ladder, they are also able to easily track some of their long-standing client accounts.

“As we’ve grown, we’ve moved managers from the field to where they can look back and go, ‘This is what’s happened, these are the notes on this client’s account,’” he says. “This way, training’s a whole lot easier.” **L&L**



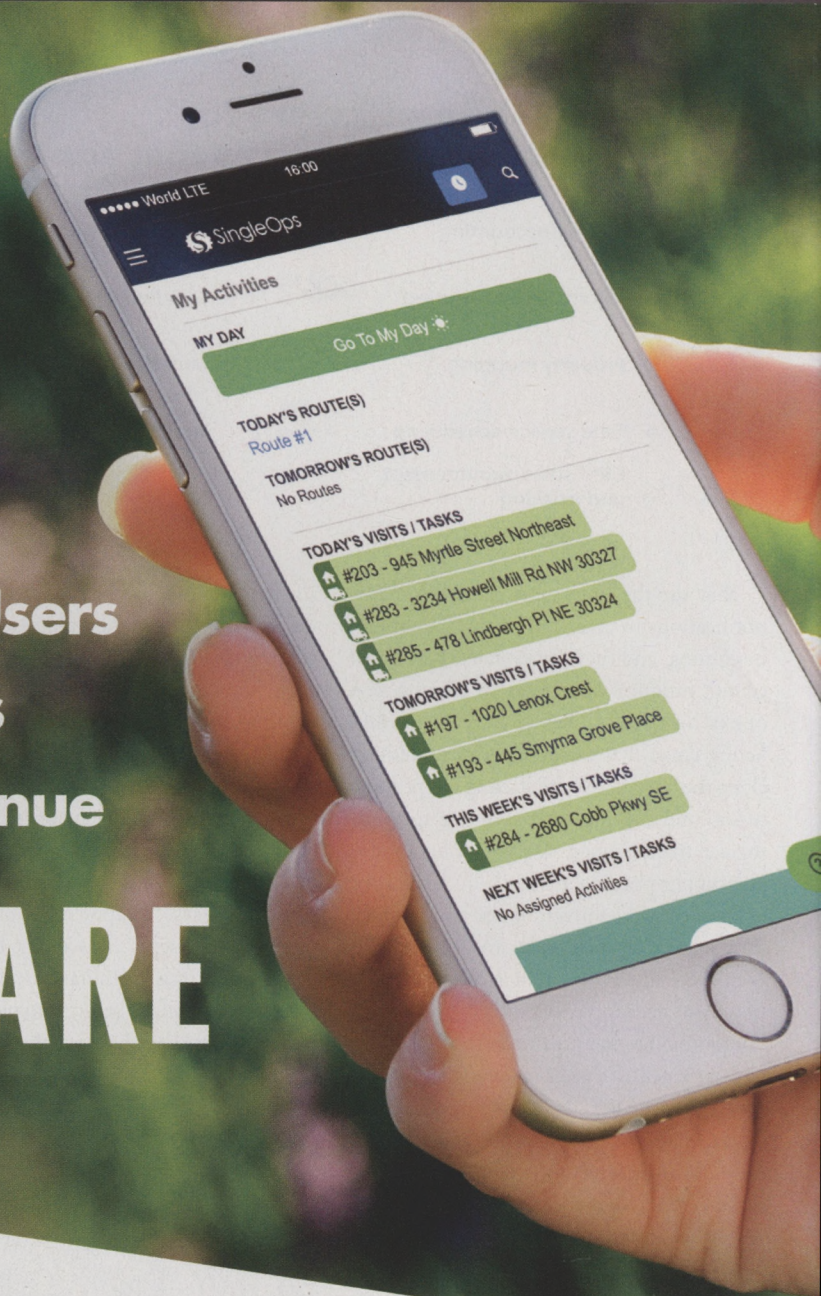
**ABOVE:** The Outback Landscape foremen use software to track which materials need ordered.

**OPPOSITE PAGE:** The Outback Landscape team needed to implement technology to improve efficiency as its company grew from eight employees to 70 in just a decade.





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