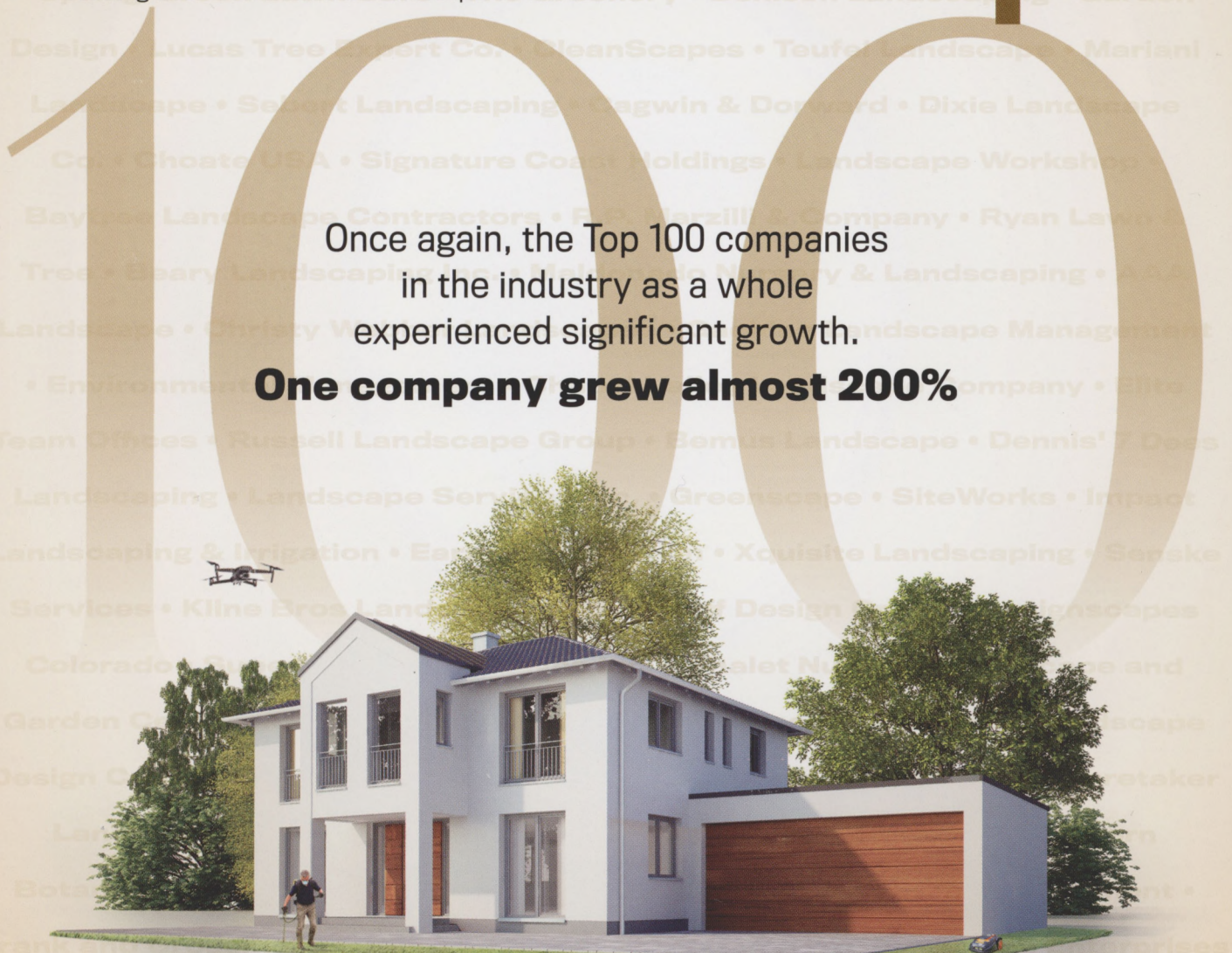


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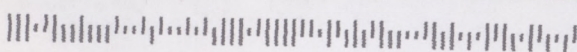
Once again, the Top 100 companies
in the industry as a whole
experienced significant growth.

One company grew almost 200%

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Winds of Change



After 30 years as a nurse, Steve Dunbar traded the operating room for the great outdoors.

The fact that he hated mowing his own lawn was overshadowed by the chance to trade a 90-minute commute for running his own business close to home, maintaining the acreage around West Virginia's Beech Ridge Wind Farm.

From the base of the mountains, it's a 15-minute drive up an old single-lane logging road to the wind farm's 67 turbines. While the view from 4,400 feet is breathtaking, the landscape is downright abusive to a commercial lawn mower.

Each turbine is surrounded by a pad of one to three acres of mowable grass over a rugged mix of rock and soil. It's bumpy, and trailering equipment in this environment is no picnic. Miles of rutted gravel roads between turbines rattle equipment to their limits at speeds as slow 10 mph. It's a real-world shaker table, proving some designs and exposing the weak points of others.

Dunbar quickly learned the compact tractor with a mower deck used on his family's acreage wasn't going to cut it on the wind farm's terrain. Not one, not two, but three commercial mowers failed to stand up to the conditions before Dunbar walked into his local Gravelly dealership and found a machine to meet his needs.

"The other brands lasted less than six months under the rough conditions," Dunbar said. "That's when I went to the Gravelly dealer and bought a couple Gravellys, and I've been using them ever since. They don't break."

In nine years, Dunbar hasn't stopped torture testing the reliability and durability of his Gravelly PRO-TURN series mowers. If the rough terrain wasn't enough to push equipment to its limits, Dunbar's operating style is no easier on his Gravelly mowers.

He scrapes his mower decks against the concrete turbine bases to avoid trimming. If a rock gets in his path, Dunbar disengages the blades, drops the deck and pushes it like a dozer. He's mowing from April to November through rain, sleet, hail, snow and endless abuse, but Dunbar's Gravelly PRO-TURNS haven't let him down.

"They aren't pretty anymore after nine seasons, but they're still going strong and rise to the challenge," he said.

"Gravelly is seriously the only thing that's held up in this terrain, and that's why we'll continue to use 'em."

For commercial cutters wanting the same durability, strength and reliability, Gravelly's expansive commercial zero-turn and stand-on lineup now features the all-new MACH ONE. Built on a PRO-TURN 200 chassis, the MACH ONE features a unique high-volume output (HVO) tunnel deck design that cuts thick, wet grass cleanly and efficiently.



Learn more at your nearby independently owned and operated Gravelly dealer at gravelly.com/dealers.

the
TOP 100



Rapid beat

After growing by almost \$100 million in 2019, the management team at HeartLand wants to hit \$500 million by 2025. **30**

A broader reach

The New Jersey-based business credits expanding its services and selling to a more diverse client base for their increased growth. **36**

Buying in

After 20 years, Ryan Lawn & Tree is fully-employee owned, and the decision to do so became an excellent recruiting chip and company culture tool for the company. **40**

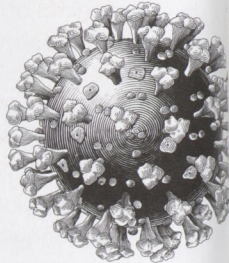
DEPARTMENTS

- 6 Editor's Insight:** Better things
- 8 LL Insider**
- 22 Huston:** Survive this economy
- 24 Wilson:** The great green reboot
- 26 Harvesters:** Get to know gross margin
- 82 Student Spotlight:** Stephanie Jocius

FEATURES

Buying and selling in a pandemic

46 Mergers and acquisition experts weigh in on how the virus is affecting current and future deals.



Choices, choices

52 With so many mower attachments out there, landscapers need to know what will work best for them.

Dollars gone & going

56 Find out what lawn care operators bought last year, and what they plan on buying this year.

The right site

58 Investments in your website can enhance your overall business.


Built for better success

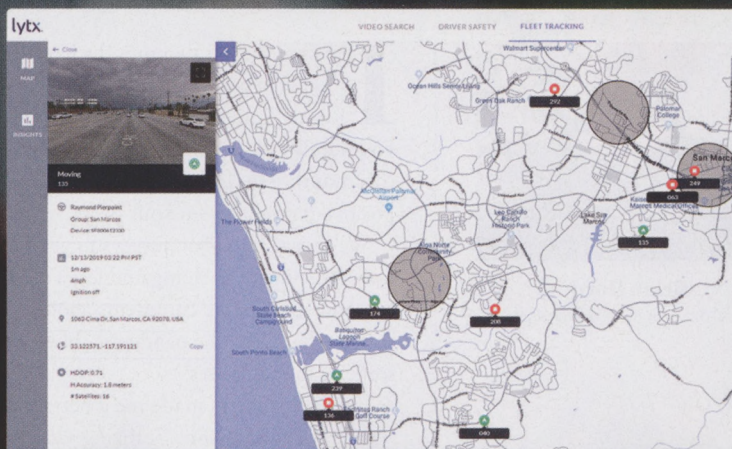
64 Make design/build projects a breeze with these products.

Slit the surface

70 If you are in the market for a trencher or vibratory plow, here are some options for your next job.

DID YOU KNOW?

 **One company added more than 200 clients in one week during COVID-19.** PG. 21



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Brian Horn
Editor, Lawn & Landscape

Reality kinda bites lately, even if you, your family and business are doing fine.

Better things

I'm sure the last two months have felt more like two years for many of you. Reality kinda bites lately, even if you, your family and business are doing fine. So, this month, I'm dedicating this space to some positive thoughts from your peers.

We've sent out a few surveys to get a feel of how the industry is doing and left a spot for respondents to leave comments about how they are handling the pandemic. Here are just some of the responses:

- I believe this has made me a better boss and businessperson. Realizing we all want and need to work but really the health of the employees and customers are the top priority – you sometimes (lose) that thought when you get so busy. Without those two key things, you are not going have a business long.
- We have found that since all the stay-at-home orders, our clients have spent time getting a lot of projects around the house done, walking around the yard and noticing things they didn't notice before. They are far

more inclined to make changes or upgrades.

- Surprisingly, this is the first time in 30 years I have not seen our industry or at least my business suffer due to this circumstance and turn down (downturn) in the economy. I feel extremely blessed which enables me to help many others.
- We have taken a positive attitude and reminded people their yard is one place that hasn't been cancelled, where fresh air and family fun are abundant. You can read more responses and find the survey results by visiting bit.ly/lawncorona.

As you continue to navigate through this year, I'll leave you with lyrics from a song that I discovered because of a COVID-19 death that seems fitting for the current climate – "Better Things" by the Kinks.

Here's wishing you the bluest sky/ And hoping something better comes tomorrow/ Hoping all the verses rhyme/And the very best of choruses, too/Follow all the doubt and sadness/ I know that better things are on the way.
– Brian Horn

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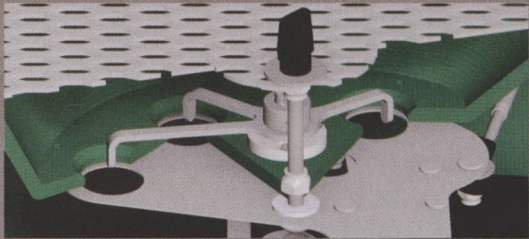
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NATIONAL HISPANIC LANDSCAPE ALLIANCE SET TO JOIN NALP

After nine years as NHLA, the move became official in April.

FAIRFAX, Va. – The National Hispanic Landscape Alliance (NHLA) will join the National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP).

Since 2011, the National Hispanic Landscape Alliance has empowered more than 500,000 Hispanic-Americans employed in the landscape industry in the United States. The Board of Directors of NHLA decided that joining forces with NALP was the best way to advance the mission of NHLA.

“Supporting Hispanic-Americans professionals is critical to the continued growth of the landscape industry,” said NALP CEO Britt Wood. “We need to bring all the nation’s

landscape professionals together to ensure that we are working together to shape the direction of the industry.”

NALP will provide NHLA with opportunities for collaboration in policymaking as well as professional and leadership development opportunities.

“We were delighted that the leadership at NALP embraced our suggestion to join forces so enthusiastically,” said NHLA president Mari Medrano. “We look forward, as we become part of NALP, to expanding our reach, doing more to empower the Hispanic American landscape community, and uniting the entire industry.”

FINN PRODUCTS USED TO HELP FIGHT CORONAVIRUS

The products are being used to disinfect public places like parks, playgrounds, playground equipment and more.

FAIRFIELD, Ohio – FINN’s HydroSeeder products, typically used to disperse seed and fertilizer, are being leveraged to assist in disinfecting public spaces, including playground equipment, parks, benches and more.

“Finn HydroSeeders are being used in communities around the world to help disinfect public spaces. Because they can significantly accelerate the time it takes to sanitize larger areas, these products are serving a particularly impor-

tant role during this crisis. We wanted to share this potential alternate use of our equipment for public good,” said Matt Hoffman, the vice president of sales and marketing of FINN Corp.

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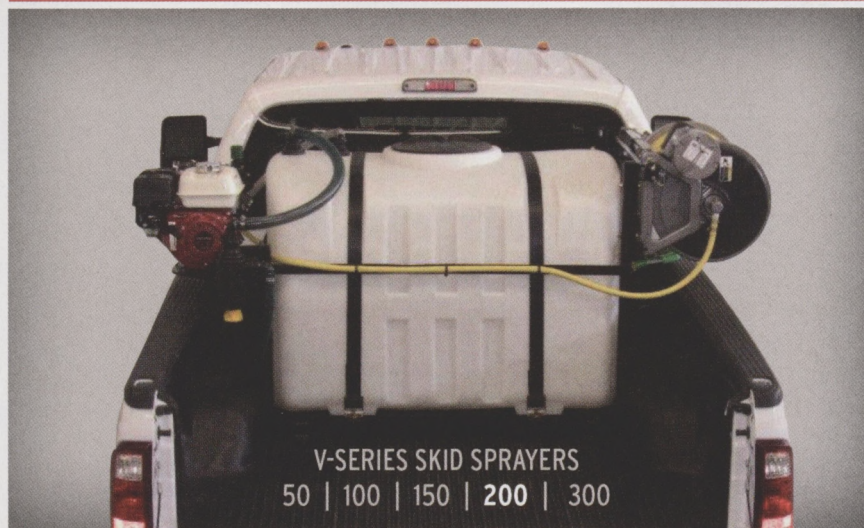
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DAVEY TREE ACQUIRES ASSETS FROM WICKES/ ARBORISTS IN NEW YORK

For 90 years, Wickes has provided residential and commercial tree services, plant health care and lawn care.

KENT, Ohio—The Davey Tree Expert Co. has acquired certain assets of Wickes/arborists in Spring Valley, New York.

For 90 years, Wickes has provided residential and commercial tree services, plant health care and lawn care in Rockland County, New York.

Jim Houston, vice president and general manager, Eastern U.S. Residential/Commercial (R/C) services, said the Wickes office will join Davey's Northeast R/C operating group. The office will conduct business as Wickes/arborists, a Davey company.

“Clients of Wickes have come to expect experienced, high-quality tree care, and they will continue to see that same level of service as well as benefit from Davey's broad research and technical capabilities,” Houston said. “Like Davey, Wickes focuses on safety and excellent client experience to achieve success. We are excited for the employees of the Wickes Team as we welcome them

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into the Davey family and deepen their career opportunities within our organization.”

The new Davey office will be led by former owners James Wickes, who will serve as district manager, and John Wickes, who will serve as assistant district manager. James and John are the grandsons of company founder Ira Wickes, who established the firm in 1929.

Wickes has 22 employees, all of whom will continue employment with Davey.

“Since my grandfather started this company, Wickes has employed safety focused and industry certified arborists, plant healthcare technicians, and lawn health care operators,” James Wickes said. “I am excited to join forces with Davey Tree. We are thankful that we can continue to be passionate about tree care in our region as we grow with Davey.”

AERO OPERATING REBRANDS AFTER SERIES OF ACQUISITIONS

The company is now Outworx Group, which represents the company’s focus on the exterior facilities maintenance market.

WESTBURY, N.Y. – Aero Operating, a portfolio company of Mill Point Capital, announced its acquisitions of Lawn Butler, a Centerville, Utah based landscaping and snow removal company; Groundtek of Central Florida, an Ocoee, Florida based landscaping company; and The Shepherd’s Landscaping, a Belleview, Florida based landscaping company.

Concurrently, Aero Operating announced that it has re-branded as Outworx Group, representing the company’s full-service offerings focused on the exterior facilities maintenance market.

“The completion of these three acquisitions marks a significant milestone in our company’s history and will allow us to offer a more complete set of services to our valued clients,” said Daryl Hendricks, CEO of Outworx Group. “We are grateful to the Bori, Larsen and Squire families for their trust in us, and we look forward to building upon the legacies that they have created.”

Outworx Group offers services spanning snow melting and removal, landscaping, industrial sweeping, paving, solid waste and catch basin cleaning.

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JOHN DEERE PRODUCES FACE SHIELDS FOR HEALTH CARE WORKERS

Production on the
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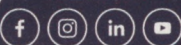
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John Deere has joined a number of organizations and companies across the country in producing protective face shields for health care workers in response to the COVID-19 health crisis.

Employees started production on April 8 at the John Deere Seeding Group in Moline, Illinois. The factory manufactures planting equipment and precision ag solutions for a global customer base.

The company expected to produce 25,000 face shields in the initial stages of production and has ordered materials and supplies to produce an additional 200,000 face shields.

The first 25,000 protective face shields were delivered to 16 U.S. Deere factories in eight states as well as the company's U.S. Deere-Hitachi factory for local distribution.

The company is using an open-source design from the University of Wisconsin-Madison for the project and leveraging expertise, skills and innovation of its employee base.

“Our manufacturing and supply management teams, along with our

PHOTO COURTESY OF JOHN DEERE



Jose Martinez, an assembler with John Deere

production and maintenance employees, the UAW, and our partners have worked tirelessly to ensure we could lend our support and protect our health care workers during this crisis,” said John May, chief executive officer, Deere & Company. “By working closely with the communities where our employees live and work, we can help support the needs we’ve identified close to home and, as the project expands, address additional, urgent needs across the country.”

The production of protective face shields is one of many initiatives the company and its employees have executed in response to the COVID-19 outbreak. Efforts in the U.S. have included the following:

- PPE donations to health care facilities
- 2:1 employee match program encouraging donations to local food banks and the American Red Cross
- Production of approximately 18,000 protective face shields for use by factory employees
- Employee volunteerism efforts to sew cloth masks for community members along with a match from the John Deere Foundation for the time invested in this volunteer activity
- Launch of a COVID-19 innovations site to share open-source specifications for related projects, including 3D-printed clips to affix face shields to protective bump caps

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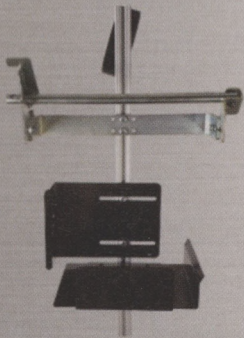
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RUPPERT LANDSCAPE ACQUIRES SCOTT & SONS

Founded in 1997 by Scott Shubert, Scott & Sons offers services on the Delmarva Peninsula.

LAYTONSVILLE, Md. – Ruppert Landscape has acquired Scott & Sons Landscaping located in Dagsboro, Delaware.

Founded in 1997 by Scott Shubert, Scott & Sons offered residential and commercial landscape maintenance, design, irrigation, pest and nutrient management, and hardscape installation on the Delmarva Peninsula.

“Similar to Ruppert, Scott & Sons invested in owning and maintaining a first-class operating facility and employed a strong team, dedicated to great customer service,” said Tom Barry, president of Ruppert’s landscape management division. “We felt that this would help give us a great base of operations in Delmarva and market-specific knowledge from which to build in the years ahead.”

The transaction includes the purchase of one facility, all commercial landscape management contracts, vehicles and equipment, and the onboarding of all employees. Ruppert will relocate their newly opened Delmarva branch from its temporary facility to join the Scott & Sons team in their facility.

“Ruppert is committed to retaining the Scott & Sons team and all of their commercial landscape maintenance contracts,” said Garth Jorgensen, Ruppert’s Delmarva branch manager. “This acquisition allows us to strengthen our newly formed team to better serve our customers and expand our service coverage in this new market.”



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SMART RAIN MAKES ACQUISITION

The water management company acquired the Weather Reach and Irrisoft brands from Campbell Scientific.

SALT LAKE CITY – Smart Rain acquired the Irrisoft and Weather Reach brands from Campbell Scientific. Smart Rain has purchased all assets as well as assuming all customer support and services.

Irrisoft is a smart landscape irrigation control business that started in 2001.

The company made the Rain Bird ET Manager, which was private labeled for Rain Bird and sold by Rain Bird for almost a decade. Irrisoft took what they learned and further advanced their product with the Weather Reach Controller Link.

"I am impressed with the simplicity and reliability of the Smart Rain system and look forward to the integration of Weather Reach technology to further improve efficient water use and sustain beautiful landscapes," said Steven Moore, president and founder of Irrisoft. Dan Hymas, president of Smart Rain

said, "We have watched and loved what Irrisoft has done over the years. It was naturally a perfect fit to take all they have built and integrate into our software and smart watering system. We believe both Irrisoft and Smart Rain customers will love even more what is yet to come from Smart Rain."

Larry Shirk, vice president of Campbell Scientific said, "This is naturally a great fit for Campbell Scientific as well. "We have enjoyed working with Smart Rain and look forward to a long-standing relationship for years to come."

RESPONDING TO THE CORONAVIRUS

Contractors nationwide are dealing with the consequences – for better or worse – of COVID-19. Here's what you told us.

By Kim Lux and Jimmy Miller

We asked about the COVID-19 pandemic and its effects on your businesses. You responded.

Nationwide, companies are being forced to adjust to unexpected consequences of the coronavirus. Some companies are seeing some surprising benefits, while others are operating cautiously as they fear the worst is yet to come.

Here's some of what you've told us so far:

**PAUL RAPOZA,
PRESIDENT & FOUNDER
RAPOZA LANDSCAPE, EAST
FALMOUTH, MASSACHUSETTS**

Rapoza Landscape is busy.

President and Founder Paul Rapoza said that due to the coronavirus threat, his clients are flocking to their vacation homes earlier than ever before.

"We're a second home market, so vacation homes," he said. "We've never seen this many of our clients at their Cape homes this time of year. People are trying to get away from it in

the cities, so they're coming to their vacation homes and hunkering down."

Rapoza said the company has had very few cancellations.

"We've experienced people pushing jobs back or putting them on hold, but we've also experienced people calling in and we're still doing estimates," he said. "We've had just as many people sign up for new work."

Because crews are still 100% operational, Rapoza said the team is being very vigilant about social distancing.

"We implemented all the CDC guidelines for social distancing," he said. "We're keeping guys out in the yard. We're not allowing anybody in our office. We're not having meetings. We usually have a kickoff meeting in the spring, but we totally scrapped it and said we'll do it later when everything calms down."

Rapoza said that while necessary, social distancing measures have been hard on the sales team when they go to give estimates.

"We're still sending the sales team out," he said. "We talk to the clients and get as much

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information as we can over the phone. Then, we tell them we'll do the estimate at a distance. It's definitely strange. Sales is all about building rapport with people and it's awkward to not shake someone's hand and to stay away from them."

All of these measures will hopefully keep his crews safe, but Rapoza said having someone contract COVID-19 and spread it is his biggest fear at this time.

"One of the things we worry about is if someone from our team gets it," he said. "Then they inadvertently expose other team members to it. We've always had small teams, but now we're sending one person in a company vehicle and asking the other person to use their personal vehicle. We're trying to keep as much distance as possible between team members."

Rapoza isn't too worried about any financial strain just yet and says he doesn't feel it will be worse than the impact of the 2009 recession.

"2009 was tough for us, we were down like 23%," he said. "I don't think we'll be anywhere near that."

RYAN PANARESE, LANDSCAPE & SNOW MANAGER
CONSTANTINE PROPERTY MANAGEMENT,
LOUDONVILLE, NEW YORK

Panarese said that while his crews are performing maintenance, he's hoping to get clarification from state officials in order to hopefully offer the rest of their services.

"We are operational," he said. "We're pretty much all commercial maintenance. The state has deemed our services as essential, with some limits. It's strictly maintenance and weed control here in New York. They've pretty much said nothing cosmetic and that's about as broad as you can be. We're kind of scratching our heads as to if annual mulching is considered cosmetic or not. We're still trying to get clarification."

So far, he hasn't had any customers cancel jobs.

"All of my customers can still work from home," he said. "I've been fairly proactive with all of our customers and letting them know what's going on."

Employees at Constantine Property Management are social distancing, but Panarese said he's having trouble finding enough sanitation supplies for them.

"All of our trucks have disinfectants in them, and we are wiping all the touch points down twice a day" he said. "I'm still trying to get my hands on hand sanitizer and masks. The guys need them. I told them if they see it, grab it and we'll reimburse you. Basically, help us help you."

Panarese said the company has implemented a one person per truck rule, and once jobs get closer to their main office, everyone will direct report.

In addition to finding supplies, Panarese said he's limiting overtime for now, but expects that will all change once the stay-at-home orders are lifted.

"We're trying to keep the hours and overtime at bay, but things will hit a bottleneck once things go back to normal," he said. "As soon as someone says 'go,' our clients will ask 'why aren't you here yet?' People



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will want to be mulched by Memorial Day and definitely by the Fourth of July.”

Before the coronavirus hit, Panarese said crews were already out doing cleanups.

“This was actually the earliest we were ever out in the field,” he said. “We were out in mid-March and were starting to do some light cleanups... and then, we got a late March storm, and we got six inches of snow. Then the virus came into play.”

Until things change, Panarese said everyone will stay cautious and crews will do what they can.

**JOSH WISE, OWNER
GRASSROOTS TREE & TURF CARE,
ACWORTH, GEORGIA**

On one hand, Josh Wise has watched five customers call and cancel their service specifically because of COVID-19.

On the other, he’s also seen his sales at Grass-Roots Tree & Turf Care in Acworth, Georgia, actually grow this year as opposed to last. He said he had a higher cancel rate last season, and in that same time, he had just under 550 new accounts for the first few months of the year. Right now, he’s looking at 900, and he’s nearly got 200 new clients this week alone.

“A lot of people had trip plans, but now they can’t go anywhere and do anything and they’re getting all these refunds, they’re saying, ‘honey, let’s do something with our lawn and landscape,’” Wise said.

He said he acknowledges the severity of the situation: His crews are practicing social distancing, and they’ve changed the way they do group meetings to a larger circle outside rather than sitting around an office. Any shipments to the office are being instantly sprayed with Lysol and equipment is being wiped down more than usual.

“You constantly hear the sink turning on and hands being washed,” he said. “Everybody’s being cautious. Employees are just going from home to work, and from work to home.”

But he’s also remaining upbeat. Among his 28 employees, Wise said he’s told them he’ll be flexible, as one employee who has a weaker immune system is already staying home for

the next few weeks. Business-wise, things seem to be humming along. Wise has increased his advertising, too, so more people are seeing his company’s name.

“All in all, things are going really well here,” he said.

**JOHN MUELLER, PRESIDENT
MUELLER LANDSCAPE,
SAN DIEGO, CALIFORNIA**

John Mueller knows it’s a scary situation, and in California, where the state issued mandated shutdowns earlier than most others, coronavirus has been a hot topic for weeks.

Yet after some of the initial concerns over whether his company had enough saved up to survive a long-term shutdown – California considers landscaping an “essential business” because of its safety and sanitary benefits – Mueller said tensions have cooled at his company.

In fact, he’s seen an uptick in sales and job applications.

Usually, the industry-wide labor shortage is so severe that one advertisement might draw a single interested applicant, Mueller said.

But now, with other businesses laying off employees – some temporarily, some permanently – things are going quite differently. He can even afford to be picky with who he selects to join the crews.

“It was extremely hard to find quality help,” Mueller said. “Now, I run an ad, I’m getting more than a dozen a day.”

His company is a smaller company with two-man crews who practice social distancing as much as they can, and Mueller has stressed to his employees that they not come in if they feel sick at all.

“When the crews get back at the end of the day, we use Lysol and spray down everything in the truck, we do an extra cleaning that wouldn’t normally get done,” he said.

Mueller is certainly seeing some positives from the COVID-19 concerns, but he acknowledges they could be temporary.

“It’s day by day,” he said. “Sometimes, it’s hour by hour. People are being laid off right now by the millions all over the country. We just don’t know what happens next.” **L&L**



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SURVIVE THIS ECONOMY PT. 1

• **IN 1992, I WROTE** my second book for the green industry. It was titled, “Preparing for & Responding to a Down Economy” and a response to the economic doldrums that we were experiencing at that time. I printed 500 copies but only sold 200. Some would call that a failure. I, however, choose to see it differently. I sold 200 copies and look what it did for the economy. It turned it right around. Can you imagine the positive impact on the economy had I sold all 500 copies?

Are recessions (periods of reduced cash flow) a reflection of a collective state of mind? Is running a successful business a state of mind? To a lesser or greater degree, I’d argue that they are. It doesn’t mean there aren’t real underlying issues and conditions that precipitate economic downturns.

I’ve monitored hundreds of green industry companies through four recessions. Here is some of what I’ve learned. I’ll focus on my observations from the 2008-9 recession.

OBSERVATIONS ABOUT ECONOMIC DOWNTURNS.

- Recessions are not singular monolithic events that affect all industries and all parts of the country equally.
- There are approximately 16 regional or geographical economies in the United States. Each is affected differently by a recession.
 - Recessions are neither predictable nor preventable.
 - Landscape contractors are extremely creative individuals. They can figure out a way to go broke even in a great economy.
 - It takes about five years to fully recover from a recession.

HOW RECESSIONS AFFECTED THE INDUSTRY

- **Landscape construction, residen-**



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

tial design/build and bid/build: This is the first segment of the green industry to go down the economic toilet. In 2009, almost all of my residential install clients saw their sales cut in half from 2008. Some suffered more drastic downturns. Their customers saw their financial portfolios cut in half.

• Landscape construction, commercial design/build and bid/build:

Most of my clients in this segment of the market had a fairly good 2009 because they had plenty of work in their pipeline. Financing for these projects was approved and the builders were finishing them.

However, this segment of the green industry took a serious hit in 2010. It wasn’t uncommon to see 20-plus contractors bid on a project. Gross profit margins dropped to just above the break-even point for most projects.

- **Landscape construction, public works:** This market segment also fared rather well in 2009. However, once the commercial and residential

installation market dried up, many of those contractors decided to get into the public works one.

- **Landscape maintenance, all segments:** Even though many of the installation contractors jumped into this market in 2009 and 2010, it remained fairly strong throughout the recession. Surprisingly, residential fine gardening and commercial enhancements remained strong, if companies had the staff to pursue such work.

- **Tree care:** Typical of most green industry service segments (as compared to the installation one), tree care work – commercial, municipal and residential, etc. – remained pretty strong during the last downturn.

This includes plant health care work. In no small way, this is partly because tree care work tends to be less discretionary than some of the other services.

- **Lawn care (chemical applications):** This part of the economy remained very strong during the 2008-9 downturn. Perhaps the resiliency of this market was partly due to customers wanting their homes, HOAs, businesses, etc. to look good on the outside in spite of the financial

woes they were experiencing on the inside.

- **Irrigation installation:** Not surprisingly, this market segment paralleled the landscape installation one. Some contractors in the golf course market actually did fairly well.

- **Irrigation service work:** Many of my clients grew significantly in this part of their business the last 10 years. Like lawn care, I think that many residential and commercial customers weren’t willing to let their lawns and shrubs dry up and die.

CONCLUSION. Economic downturns, while virtually inevitable, are survivable. To a large extent, they are what I call a state of mind. Many of my clients grew significantly during the recession of 2008-9.

When the economy shrinks, you need to study what is happening externally in the economy and internally in yourself and your business. Next time, we’ll discuss specific things that you can do to not only prepare for an economic downturn but also what to do once you get in one. **L&L**

Contact Jim Huston at jhuston@giemedia.com



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THE GREAT GREEN REBOOT

• **QUARTER 1 DATA WAS UNPRECEDENTED.** And like so many other things that will measure COVID-19's impact, the data of disruption will define our performance and recovery strategies as we set clear goals for a post-pandemic new normal.

How deep, how sharp and how exponential the impact is still up in the air. The way back will require a rebound mindset as we rebuild financial cushions, refresh our operations and innovation engines and become better versions of our pre-pandemic selves.

While recovery will vary across segments, these 10 guiding principles are a good place to start.

1. GO LONG. Through past recessions or economic shocks, maintaining customer relationships for the long haul has been a proven winner. This has been a guiding principle of mine for all times, good and bad. Talk to your customers, feel their pain points and adjust accordingly.

2. DO WHATEVER IT TAKES. You can't make money on a job you don't have. Focus on what you do best and what's most profitable and, if necessary, adjust revenue expectations or make difficult compromises with customers so you can live to fight another day. Unless it is an impossible situation, do whatever it takes to hang on to the relationship, the account, and recover and rebuild it in a position of strength. And look around you: You may be able to expand your customer base by drawing in new



BRUCE WILSON is principal of green industry consulting firm Bruce Wilson & Company.

business by way of offering a different level of service.

3. COMMUNICATE. Listen to your employees, partners, customers and vendors and engage them in a two-way conversation about issues and concerns, learn how they are being impacted and how you can become a resource. It's easy to send e-mails but don't. A one-way conversation about your shutdowns and shelter-in-place orders aren't what your stakeholders need to hear. Pick up the phone and keep the personal relationship going. Publish critical information on your website, create a video and link to it. In any crisis, lead with empathy, be accessible, listen and respond accordingly.

4. BE STRATEGIC & INFORMED. Become informed about unemployment and government relief funds for workers, and financial assistance and other resources to help your businesses as a result of COVID-19 impacts. Work closely with your tax and legal teams,

or other consulting advisors to build a strategically solid financial recovery plan.

5. PROTECT CASH FLOW. Implement proactive strategies to protect cash flow and prevent problems. Seal leaks in the system, stay on top of receivables, focus on variable costs and ask for better terms. Use slowdown time as an opportunity for planning. Cash will continue to be an issue – especially if the economy does not rebound quickly.

6. BUILD A STRONG OFFENSE. Playing defense and being reactive will leave your company in an understaffed state when the pendulum swings back. Do everything you can to keep your team together and look for ways to recruit available talent from other companies that let people go to save money.

7. HAVE A WINNING STRATEGY. Become your company's Chief Inspiration Officer and its motivating force. Your team must be able to see the light at the end of the tunnel. Articulate how any organizational changes you're making, like cutting costs to save jobs, are good for the team, good for employees and communicate

change messages in a positive way to keep morale high.

8. WALK THE TALK. This is not the time to buy a new car or send contradictory signals. It could be a good time to buy equipment since the equipment market is depressed. If you do that, communicate the thought process and again, explain why your decision is good for the company and your employees.

9. FIX WHAT'S BROKEN. Audit business practices and workplace habits for an emerging economy. Clean up the bad habits and waste that may have proliferated or been hidden by a robust economy.

10. DON'T CUT BACK ON MARKETING AND SALES. Difficult times are exactly when your business needs a strong value proposition, relevant messaging, marketing and sales. Homeowners and commercial real estate clients are re-assessing service relationships, and are making changes in how they buy and contract for landscaping. PR, community service and video will keep your brand front and center and help make your company a trusted resource. **L&L**

Contact Bruce Wilson at bwilson@giemedia.com



GET TO KNOW GROSS MARGIN

● **THERE ARE LOTS OF AREAS** of your financials that deserve attention: revenue, equipment, salaries, tools, rent. But few are more important than gross margin – a key metric that determines your company’s financial success. It’s just as important as revenue, cash flow and accounts receivable.

Remember that without the right amount of gross margin, you won’t be able to pay your overhead costs and have enough left over to make a net profit.

The gross margin of your company pays for all of the overhead, which includes indirect costs like gas, equipment, vehicles, supervisors and mechanics, as well as SGA costs (sales, general and administration) like salespeople, office staff, administration staff, yard rent and your salary.

Whatever is left over after paying for the overhead costs is net profit. Without achieving the right amount of gross margin, we just become very hardworking folks making a living and not a profit.

THE GOAL FOR GROSS MARGIN (GROSS PROFIT) – 45% MINIMUM AND 50% + DESIRED.

Generally, the combined gross margin of a company needs to be a minimum of 45% and preferably 50% to make a fair and reasonable net profit. Gross margin is the financial furnace that keeps the company warm. First, let’s discuss how to calculate this important metric.

Overall Company Revenue (self-performed work) minus Overall Direct Costs (Labor + Payroll Taxes + Workers’ Compensation Insurance



BILL ARMAN is a landscape business consultant. He spent nearly 30 years at one of the industry’s biggest companies.

+ Materials) equals Overall Company Gross Margin or Gross Profit. This should be a minimum of 45% and ideally 50% or higher.

Now calculate your gross margins for each revenue stream (i.e., maintenance, extras, install, snow, irrigation, etc.). Note: gross margins per revenue stream will vary from a low of 40% to a high of 65% or more for snow.

THE 5 DRIVERS OF GROSS MARGIN. When looking at reasons for achieving low or high gross margins, they can be traced back to five areas. We usually find it’s a combination of all five of these that eat up gross margin.

1. HAW: Hourly Average Wage. Know what your labor cost is on average per revenue stream. This is the average per hour of crew leaders and workers combined, plus payroll taxes and WC insurance. These vary by revenue stream, and generally range from \$18 to \$22 per hour.

2. Estimating. This is where it

begins with an accurate assessment of what it takes to do the job with the needed labor and materials. Calculate HAWs and how much material will it take.

3. Pricing. After you have accurately estimated the total direct costs to perform the work, you need a method to arrive at a price that will achieve the right gross margin. You also need to be competitive within your marketplace. Divide overall direct costs by the reciprocal of desired gross margin to arrive at the price needed to get your targeted gross margin. Example: If your costs = \$1,000 and the desired GM is 45%, take the \$1,000 cost and divide by .55 = sales price of \$1,818.

4. Efficiency and Execution. After the first three parts are completed, you need to execute the work on budget, make the customer happy and collect the money. This area always needs keen scrutiny. It deals with how well your budgeted time to complete work compares to the actual time it takes to finish the job. Obviously, the more you beat the budget, the better. Keep in mind that if you always easily beat the hours budget, you may be over-estimating the hours needed to complete the job, or you may

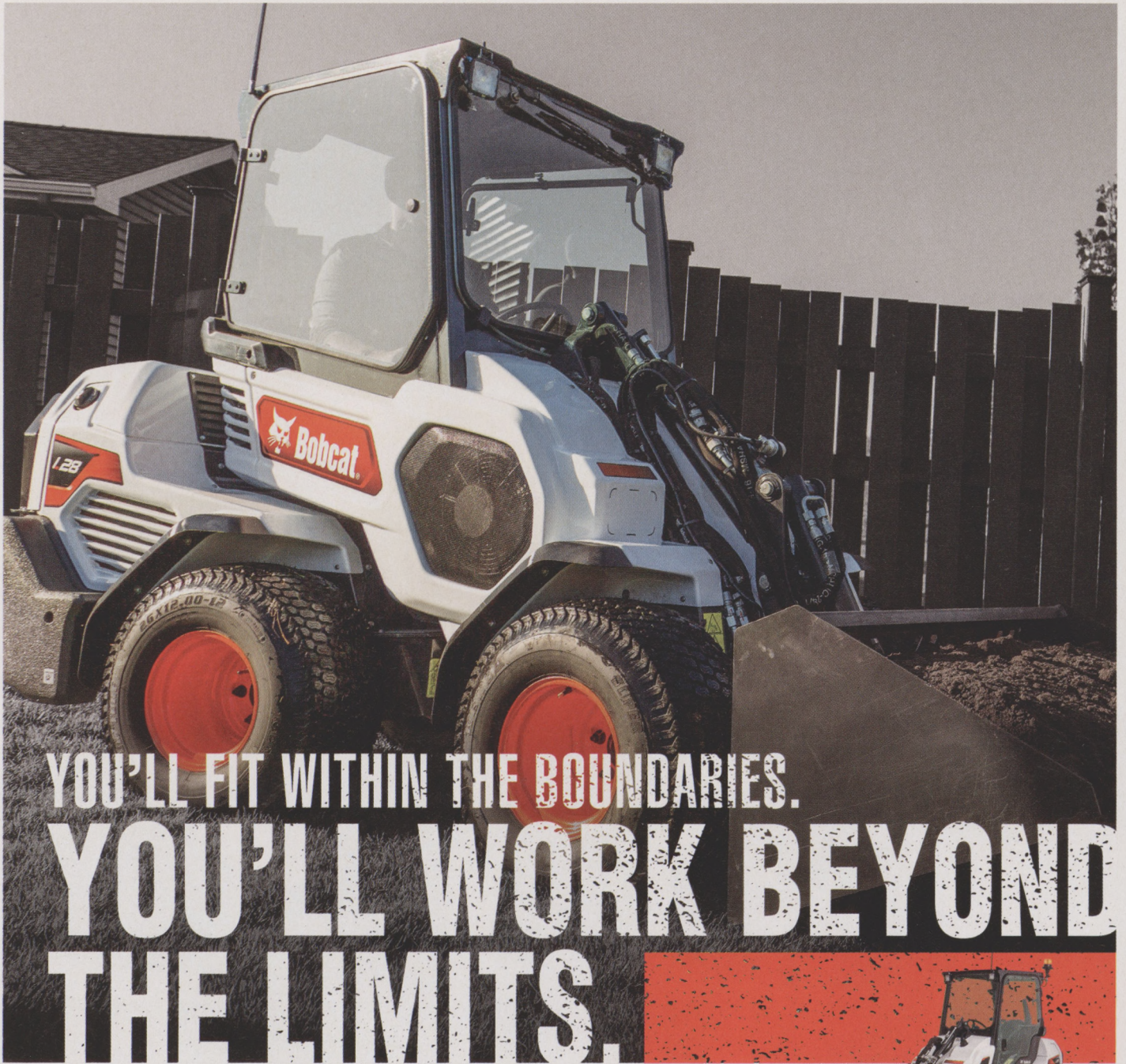
be sacrificing delivering on quality. Always look for areas to improve your completion time.

Even the best-laid plans and estimates will have hiccups or unexpected costs; others will have some victories. Always be on alert as the job unfolds for things that will whittle away your gross margin. Focus on your budgeted hours and materials, and keep track of how you are spending your time on the job.

5. Renewals. For maintenance folks, here is the final way to increase your gross margin. Focus on the right renewals with appropriate increases to cover your added costs particularly with the cost of your workforce in mind. Look for the best and most efficient means to accomplish the work on budget and with the expected level of quality delivered for your customers.

Now you have the tools to figure out and monitor one of the most important financial metrics in your company. Remember, that if you don’t plan on the correct amount of gross margin for each revenue stream, you won’t have enough at the end of the day to make any money as in NET Profit. **L&L**

Contact Bill Arman at harvest@giemedia.com



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A new normal

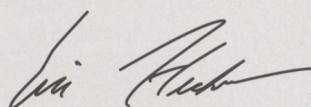
ONCE AGAIN, Kohler is excited to participate in the Lawn & Landscape Top 100 celebration. Each business on this list has shown dedication to the industry, and should be extremely proud of their accomplishments!

Each year brings new challenges, and 2020 has proven to be extremely difficult for both the world as well as the lawn & landscape industry. The COVID-19 global pandemic has impacted everyone on both a personal and business level. We have all needed to adapt to the reality of a “new normal” – and have tried our best to manage our families and businesses to these unprecedented circumstances.

2020 is the 100th anniversary of Kohler Engines and the 147th anniversary of the Kohler Company. Like many of you, we remain a family-owned and family-run business. During these many years, Kohler has weathered its share of challenges. It is truly amazing to see how many of you continue to persevere and thrive during these difficult times. Please trust that you are not in this alone.

Kohler believes it is important to be stewards of our business, employees and communities we serve. It is also important we help our customers maintain a continuity of business. As a partner in the lawn & landscape industry, Kohler wants to reaffirm our dedication to your businesses and your families. We are facing these difficult times together. Whether it is producing face shields, providing mobile showering units, setting up emergency handwashing stations, delivering backup generators to hospitals, building replacement engines or providing timely service parts – we are working every day to make sure you can stay safe and provide for your customers and families.

We’re all in this together. Please stay safe, and once again, congratulations on your success!



ERIC HUDAK
DIRECTOR – PRODUCT MARKETING
KOHLER ENGINES



It is truly amazing to see how many of you continue to persevere and thrive during these difficult times.



RAPID BEAT

After growing by almost \$100 million in 2019, the management team at HeartLand wants to hit \$500 million by 2025.

By Brian Horn

TO SAY IT WAS A BUSY 2019 for HeartLand would be an understatement. The company grew 189% going from \$55.7 million in revenue in 2018 to \$155 million in 2019. They acquired five commercial landscaping companies last year totaling almost \$95 million in revenue, while also growing organically, landing the company at **No 14**.

Kansas City based HeartLand was founded in 2016 by Edward Schatz, Jr., who previously started Austin Outdoor in Florida in 1994. Schatz grew and eventually sold Austin Outdoor to Yellowstone Landscape in 2008, where he stayed on board as regional president until January of 2015 when Yellowstone was sold to CIVC Partners. After Yellowstone and before starting HeartLand, Schatz said he kept hearing the common theme from other owners that there has to be a better way to do business.

“There’s got to be a way to do this right without overleveraging these businesses and becoming an accounting company that mows grass,” Schatz says. “It still gets back to one simple notion that the landscaping business is local and it’s really relationship driven, especially on the commercial maintenance side.”

That notion has been a guiding force for HeartLand’s approach to acquisitions, both before and after making one.

“I think that you are seeing groups and private equity that recognizes that there is power in the goodwill of local brands, but there’s also power in the culture,” he says.

DEALS TO BE MADE. Schatz partnered with a private equity firm, Great Range Capital, and made its first acquisition – Signature Landscape in Kansas City – in early 2016 and later that year added Keesen Landscape in Denver. Early in 2017, he was joined by Bill Dellecker, who came on as chief development officer, and then Peter Welch, as chief financial officer; both had worked with Schatz at Austin Outdoor and Yellowstone. The trio started a string of acquisitions that netted them seven platform companies, plus a handful of smaller acquisitions that the platform companies absorbed. Since forming, the company has made a total of 12 acquisitions.

With that much M&A activity, cultural fit could be a huge undertaking. Schatz says HeartLand does a lot of the legwork before a deal is made to make sure the selling owner is aligned with HeartLand’s. Schatz says he seeks out companies across the central United States in the Midwest that fit in with HeartLand’s ideal service mix of 75% commercial maintenance and 25% winter/ancillary services.

“If it’s not a fit from a cultural perspective

the
TOP 100

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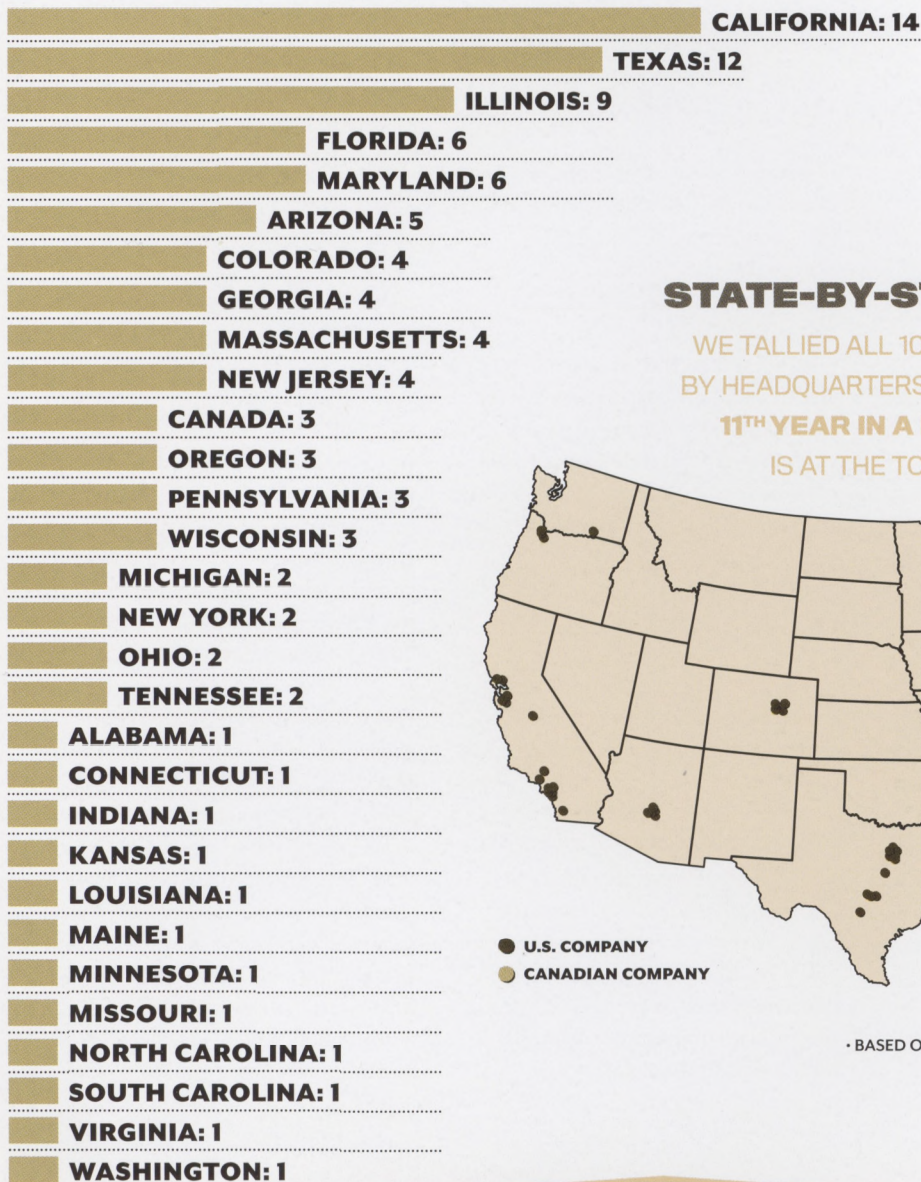
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STATE BREAKDOWN

California is once again the headquarter king of Top 100 companies.

In fact, the order compared to last year doesn't change until Georgia jumped into a tie for 8th place, moving up from 9th place.



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WE TALLIED ALL 100 FIRMS' LOCATIONS BY HEADQUARTERS ADDRESS. **FOR THE 11TH YEAR IN A ROW, CALIFORNIA IS AT THE TOP OF THE LIST.**



· BASED ON DATA COMPILED BY LAWN & LANDSCAPE

ON THE WAY UP

This year the total Top 100 list grew by \$821,072,893 or 8.3%. Below were the companies that experienced the highest growth percentage from 2018 to 2019. The revenue of these companies totaled \$409,922,774.

14(T) HEARTLAND Mission Woods, Kansas 189%	34 TEUFEL LANDSCAPE Hillsboro, Oregon 49%	41 SIGNATURE COAST HOLDINGS Napa, California 36%	71 LANDSCAPE DESIGN CONCEPTS Norwood, New Jersey 35%	47 MALDONADO NURSERY & LANDSCAPING San Antonio 31%
81(T) MCHALE LANDSCAPE Upper Marlboro, Maryland 30%	94(T) LMI LANDSCAPES Carrollton, Texas 30%	70 ENVIRONMENTAL DESIGNS Henderson, Colorado 28%	59 IMPACT LANDSCAPING & IRRIGATION Jupiter, Florida 27%	79 FRANK AND GROSSMAN LANDSCAPE CONTRACTORS Hayward, California 27%

the TOP 100

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ABOUT THIS LIST

LAWN & LANDSCAPE usually lists percentage change expected for the following year. Due to COVID-19 effects on the economy, we left that category off the list this year. Most information is reported by each company listed, and supplemental data are sourced from public records and reporting by L&L staff.

- ▶ Companies on the list earned a combined revenue of \$11,042,808,036 in 2019, which is an increase of \$821,072,893 or 8.3% compared to 2018. Companies also reported total employment of 112,101.
- ▶ **Brightview** does not include US Lawns revenue but does include franchise payments.
- ▶ **The Davey Tree Expert Company** does not separate its landscape management revenue

- ▶ **Signature Coast Holdings LLC** was acquired by Brightview in January of 2020.
- ▶ **Conserve Landcare** was acquired by Sperber Landscape Companies in Aug of 2019.
- ▶ This year's list includes companies from 29 states and 3 firms.
- ▶ Revenue reported in Canadian dollars has been converted to US dollars using 2019 average conversion rate of .75.

ABBREVIATIONS

- %CLC/F: Chemical Lawn Care/Fertilization
- %LD/B/I: Landscape Design/Build/Install
- %II/MT: Irrigation Installation/Maintenance
- %IL: Interior Landscaping
- %CR: Commercial Revenue
- %RR: Residential Revenue
- N/A: No Answer/Unknown
- %MT: Maintenance

✦ INDICATES NEW TO THE LIST
OR NOT ON LIST LAST YEAR

68	Chalet Nursery, Landscape and Garden Center	70	\$29,868,100	350	5%	60%	5%	35%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%
69	Gibbs Landscape Co.	78	\$29,300,000	385	9%	70%	0%	30%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	60%	40%
70	Environmental Designs	92	\$29,250,000	286	28%	17%	2%	51%	8%	0%	0%	0%	0%	75%	25%
71	Landscape Design Concepts	*	\$29,225,000	50	35%	35%	0%	35%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	77%	23%
72	Merchants Landscape Services	71(f)	\$29,000,000	490	5%	85%	5%	5%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
73	Naturescape	73	\$28,998,182	305	5%	10%	80%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%	95%
74	Caretaker Landscape and Tree Management	61	\$28,845,000	314	-9%	31%	0%	57%	4%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
75	Perfect Cuts of Austin	82	\$28,800,000	98	12%	29%	1%	55%	15%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
76	Southern Botanical	69	\$28,734,594	235	4%	17%	4%	53%	15%	0%	0%	0%	0%	50%	50%
77	The Bruce Co. of Wisconsin	76	\$28,531,000	318	4%	35%	0%	52%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	80%	20%
78	Pacific Landscape Management	88	\$28,408,851	320	16%	50%	0%	30%	10%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
79	Frank and Grossman Landscape Contractors	96	\$28,400,000	280	27%	35%	0%	10%	40%	5%	35%	5%	35%	65%	0%
80	Harvest Landscape Enterprises	80	\$28,000,000	450	10%	50%	5%	20%	15%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
81(t)	McHale Landscape	98(t)	\$27,000,000	260	30%	35%	0%	65%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
81(t)	Stay Green	81	\$27,000,000	365	5%	85%	0%	4%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
83	David J. Frank Landscape Contracting	77	\$26,150,000	400	2%	33%	3%	33%	2%	1%	65%	35%	0%	0%	0%
84(t)	DLC Resources	86	\$26,000,000	370	10%	85%	0%	5%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
84(t)	Scott Byron and Co.	83	\$26,000,000	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
86	Southview Design	95	\$25,745,476	196	16%	30%	0%	56%	3%	0%	0%	0%	0%	48%	52%
87	Down To Earth Landscape	*	\$25,678,000	94	15%	10%	0%	70%	10%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
88	Great Oaks Landscape Associates	*	\$25,600,000	220	20%	37%	0%	41%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	70%	30%
89	Gibson Landscape Services	*	\$25,269,578	150	15%	14%	3%	78%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	98%	2%
90	DJ's Landscape Management	*	\$25,111,000	360	21%	35%	5%	5%	2%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
91	Designs by Sundown	84(t)	\$25,000,000	230	10%	24%	3%	64%	7%	0%	0%	0%	0%	15%	85%
92	Earthworks	97	\$24,985,000	410	13%	60%	0%	27%	15%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
93	Munie Greencare Professionals	*	\$24,823,090	400	23%	78%	5%	9%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	95%	5%
94(t)	LMI Landscapes	*	\$24,500,000	234	30%	36%	0%	43%	21%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
94(t)	Meadows Farms	*	\$24,500,000	500	9%	5%	4%	90%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%	95%
96	NutriLawn	94	\$24,016,414	420	4%	0%	90%	0%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	5%	95%
97	Conserve Landcare	*	\$24,016,152	350	20%	70%	0%	30%	0%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
98	The Budd Group	90	\$24,000,000	400	5%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	100%	0%
99	Andre Landscape Service	93	\$23,866,000	280	5%	75%	5%	5%	5%	0%	0%	0%	0%	100%	0%
100	WLE	*	\$23,500,000	255	21%	35%	4%	40%	18%	1%	100%	0%	0%	0%	0%

TOP 100 NEWS

Top 100 companies are in the headlines a lot. Here is a sample.

JANUARY

• **Yellowstone Landscape** acquired Native Land Design. The move expanded Yellowstone's growth opportunities in Austin, Houston, and McAllen, Texas. Native Land Design focuses on commercial properties and was founded in 2001 with revenue around \$15 million and a staff of 250 people at the time of the acquisition.

• **TruGreen** appointed three new executives to its leadership team. Michael Sims joined TruGreen as senior vice president and chief financial officer, and the company hired Anthony Conversa as chief growth officer and Ayman Taha as chief information officer.

• **BrightView** acquired Emerald Landscape Company, a commercial landscaping company located in California's Bay Area. Emerald provides commercial landscape maintenance, enhancement, tree care, turf management and irrigation services, employing more than 200 people.

• Brenda Rice retired as co-founder and president of **Weed Man** after nearly 50 years. CEO of the United States master franchisor, Roger Mongeon, took over leadership of the Canadian territories. Mongeon formed a new company called TH Canada. Jennifer Lemcke, Weed Man's chief operating officer, will work with all the Weed Man Canada franchisees.

• **The Greenery** was named the 2018 Employee Owned Company of the Year by the Carolinas Chapter of the national Employee Stock Ownership Plan Association for meeting the award's criteria. Among other assessments, The Greenery won for effectively communicating the benefits of employee ownership as it relates to the success of the company. There are

approximately 100 ESOP companies that comprise the Carolinas Chapter in South Carolina and North Carolina.

• **SavATree** acquired Integrity Tree Service of Phoenix, Arizona – the company's first in Arizona.

FEBRUARY

• David J. Frank died on Feb. 9 at the age of 69. He started **David J. Frank Contracting** in 1959 and grew the company to more than \$25 million in revenue. Visit bit.ly/davidjfrank to read Lawn & Landscape's profile from last year's Top 100 issue.

• **BrightView** acquired Benchmark Landscapes, a commercial landscaping company headquartered in Austin, Texas. Benchmark was founded in 2002 and provided landscape maintenance, design, installation, hardscapes, irrigation and tree care. It ranked No. 82 on Lawn & Landscape's 2018 Top 100 and reported a 2017 revenue of over \$23 million. Benchmark's 240 employees cover a service area from Austin to San Antonio, inclusive of the San Marcos and New Braunfels areas, and Corpus Christi. The company operated six branches in four markets.

MARCH

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

• **David J. Frank Landscape Contracting** hired John Joestgen to its newly created position of chief operating officer. Joestgen joined the company with over 30 years of experience in the landscape

industry, more than 20 of those in an executive capacity.

APRIL

• **Weed Man** added mosquito control to its current list of services. With the addition, Weed Man increased to 21 service offerings.

MAY

• **Russell Landscape Group** opened a new branch in Tampa, Florida through a partnership with FirstService Residential and the Federation of Kings Point Associations. Along with the new branch, the company has also promoted Ken Knight to CFO. Knight joined the company in 2016 as the financial controller.

• **BrightView** acquired Luke's Landscaping in Florida and Desert Classic Landscaping in Arizona, both previously owned and operated by FirstService Residential, a subsidiary of FirstService Corporation. Both Luke's and Desert Classic are year-round landscape service providers and offer a full suite of commercial landscaping solutions, including grounds management, landscape enhancement, irrigation, spray and arbor services.

JUNE

• **Ruppert Landscape** added Scott Schoffstall as regional irrigation manager in the company's landscape management division.

JULY

• **Juniper Landscaping** acquired the assets of Coast to Coast Landscaping along with its affiliated companies. The Coast to Coast companies (Southeast

S & NOTES

ing of some news they made in 2019.

Irrigation, Coast to Coast Pest Control and East Coast Tree Company) will continue to operate as Coast to Coast Landscaping with the full backing of the Juniper Landscaping brand and team. Coast to Coast Landscaping is a regional provider of landscape maintenance services in the Vero Beach and Port St. Lucie area with over 220 employees.

• **LandCare's** management team and a small group of investors led by Scott Brickman bought the company from private equity firm Aurora Resurgence. At the time of the sale, the company had 52 branches in 20 states. LandCare rebranded in 2015 under new leadership. Created in 1999 through the merger of TruGreen and LandCare USA, TruGreen LandCare was the first national rollup, comprised of over 75 local and regional landscape companies. Under ServiceMaster, from 2000 to 2010, the company divested of several product lines to focus on commercial maintenance before its sale to Aurora Resurgence in 2011. In late 2014, Aurora Resurgence hired industry veteran and former Brickman Executive Vice President Mike Bogan and rebranded as LandCare.

• **SavATree** named Mike Schoeni and Guy Gunther regional vice presidents and also acquired Clear Cut Tree and Lawn Care of Monroe, Connecticut.

AUGUST

• **BrightView** acquired Pro Scapes, a commercial landscaping company headquartered in Jamesville, New York. The company has 150 employees and provide grounds maintenance, snow removal and irrigation services to their customers across commercial and industrial properties and upscale condominium complexes in Onondaga County.

• **Sperber Landscape Companies (SLC)** acquired Conserve LandCare, headquartered in California's Coachella Valley. Richard Sperber, former ValleyCrest CEO, launched the Calabasas, California-based SLC in April of 2019.

• **Davey Tree** was named the ninth largest employee-owned company in the U.S., according to a report from the National Center for Employee Ownership (NCEO). Davey moved from the 12th largest company in 2018 to its current ranking on the NCEO 2019 Employee Ownership 100 list. Companies are ranked on the list according to the number of the employees. The NCEO's 2019 Employee Ownership 100 list includes the nation's largest companies that are majority owned by an employee stock ownership plan (ESOP) or other broad-based employee ownership plan.

SEPTEMBER

• **Sterling Investment Partners** acquired HeartLand, a Kansas City-based commercial landscape management firm, from Great Range Capital. HeartLand provides commercial grounds maintenance, enhancements and winter services to a customer base consisting of class-A office, industrial, institutional and homeowner associations.

NOVEMBER

• **Harvest Partners** acquired Yellowstone Landscape from CIVC Partners. Yellowstone is headquartered in Palm Coast, Florida. It was also announced that the company's management team will continue to lead Yellowstone and remain significant owners of the business. Yellowstone provides commercial landscape services to over 5,000 customers throughout the southern United States,

including corporate campuses, resorts and hotels, homeowners' associations, multi-family communities, schools, hospitals and municipalities.

• **BrightView** acquired Heaviland Enterprises, a commercial landscaping company headquartered in San Diego and Clean Cut Lawns in Mesa, Arizona. Heaviland employs 150 people and provides landscape maintenance, irrigation and landscape enhancement services out of two San Diego County facilities. Clean Cut Lawns employs 110 people and offers grounds management, landscape enhancement, irrigation, arbor care and pest control services. The company also added to its executive team. Amanda Orders, senior vice president of human resources for the company's maintenance services segment, was promoted to executive vice president and chief human resources officer.

• **SavATree** acquired Pauley Tree and Lawn Care of New Canaan, Connecticut.

DECEMBER

• **Davey Tree** acquired certain assets of B. Haney & Sons Tree Service, which is based in the greater Chicago area. B. Haney & Sons provides residential and commercial tree care, plant health care and wood waste recycling services at its Lombard, Illinois, office. The firm has 12 employees who will continue with Davey in the operation, which will become the Davey Lombard Residential/Commercial services office. Davey also acquired Dominion Tree Service in Windsor, Ontario, and Mountain Maple Garden & Tree Service, in Vancouver, British Columbia, which joined Davey Tree Expert Company of Canada. Dominion provides residential and commercial tree care services.



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**100**  
THE TOP 100

**RANK: 14 REVENUE: \$155 MILLION**



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**PETER WELCH**  
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**ROB MCDONNELL**  
CHIEF ACQUISITION  
OFFICER

for HeartLand, then we just won't move forward with the acquisition," Schatz says. "We've walked away from a handful of deals." HeartLand's senior leadership meets with the owner and the management team to assess the fit and the reasons on why the owner is selling.

"Inevitably, all entrepreneurs at some point usually reach their ceiling and where they're comfortable at in their business. And sometimes for a platform company that could be \$10 million and other times it's \$40 million or \$50 million," Schatz says.

"But at some point, as they continue to invest in their business and grow it, they reach a certain threshold that they're comfortable with and where continuing to grow at the same pace requires significantly more investment. Usually, it's greater investment in people."

**PEOPLE IMPORTANCE.** Once a deal is made, it's up to the selling owner to determine how to share the news with employees.

"Typically, what we have seen is that owners are usually fatigued by the end of the process with the layers of diligence and financial review that takes place. We call it deal fatigue and it's inherent in any transaction," Schatz says. "Post-closing, we give them a few weeks to decompress and say to the management team, 'You let us know the right time.' Usually they want to make the announcement internally themselves and they personally want to address their key customers."

Once the announcement is made, HeartLand makes a presentation to the local management team on what the company is about and what employees can expect after the acquisition. "Most of the time, their concerns are alleviated because it all comes back to managers and employees; they want to understand what the change means for them personally," he says. "When we say that very little changes post-closing in the way they execute from a day-to-day business perspective, we've backed it up."

Owners will usually stay on a year or two in a transitional role before stepping away. "We don't want to lose the culture of the business because the owner has changed," Schatz says. "But for most of the owners, their number two person who was their VP of operations or their COO in some cases, are running those companies now."





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# 100

THE TOP 100

To develop current employees, the company rolled out HeartLand University of Excellence in January of this year. It's focused on five core courses that have been designed for division presidents, business leaders, operations teams, account management teams and business development teams. Other specialty courses are also being developed. Training takes place at the company's new headquarters in downtown Kansas City and also using videoconference.

The university criteria were built on years of surveying employees and customers about areas where the company could improve. One common request that came back was a desire for more training.

"It could be as simple as public speaking," Schatz says. "We've got courses designed around account managers engaged in

focused client conversations and making presentations; for instance, how to handle when a client puts a project out for bid under various scenarios."

The trip into Kansas City also allows employees to meet each other and get a feel for the type of culture HeartLand wants to develop, says Rob McDonnell, chief acquisition officer.

"Ultimately, that sort of environment and training strategy lends itself well to enhancing and further creating a culture around all (of our) different businesses," he says. "It's an open environment. People stay in touch obviously afterward to share different ideas and strategies around clients and organic growth initiatives."

**FUTURE ACQUISITIONS.** Schatz says the goal

is to reach revenue of \$500 million in 4-5 years. As far as how COVID-19 will affect those plans, he says it's still too early to know the intermediate revenue implications, but as of mid-April, HeartLand is not experiencing wide-spread service deferrals, scope reductions or cancellations.

One step in reaching that \$500 million goal was working with a new investment firm. In August of 2019, the HeartLand leadership team partnered with Westport, Connecticut-based Sterling Investment Partners, who acquired Great Range Capital's interest, in order to pursue larger growth opportunities.

"One of their key initiatives with us was to bring our M&A in house to develop a team that could handle an aggressive deal flow," he says.

McDonnell, who worked for BrightView







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### TIRESOME DETAILS

HEARTLAND OFTEN GIVES COMPANIES A FEW WEEKS TO NOTIFY THEIR EMPLOYEES OF AN ACQUISITION BECAUSE OF "DEAL FATIGUE."

for 11 years, was hired in January to lead the M&A group, which has added a few additional members along with McDonnell. "Rob brings a new dimension to us and we've invested heavily in putting an entire acquisition model together and identifying targeted Metropolitan Statistical Areas (MSA) and opportunities within those MSAs across another nine to 12 states, all in similar markets with similar seasons that we have in Kansas City."

Schatz says HeartLand is looking as far west as Utah and as far east as Pennsylvania. "Not too far north and none too far south," Schatz says. "If we are capable of growing faster than that, we will, but we're not going to grow so fast that we put ourselves into a speed wobble."

Schatz says the company's focus is to leverage the platform companies to grow organically, and to work more acquisitions at the same time as they recently did with the December 2019 closings on Landscape Concepts in Chicago and Heritage Landscape in Virginia, both with about \$30 million in revenue. "It's really not about increasing the pace or the velocity of acquisitions," Schatz says. "It's really about broadening our ability to cover multiple opportunities simultaneously." **L&L**

# HeartLand's list of platform company acquisitions

**HEARTLAND DOES NOT CHANGE** the name of its acquired platform companies – going back to what Schatz learned when he was exploring opportunities in between Yellowstone and HeartLand – the relationships companies have built on the local level are invaluable.

"Some of the companies we've acquired have been in business since the '70s, and their brands have not been updated in a number of years," Schatz says. "So, we do invest in updating and modernizing the logos and the different aspects, so you'll see some commonality across the brands, but the names don't change."

**Here's a list of the platform acquisitions the company has done since launching in 2016:**

#### 2016

- **April:** Signature Landscape, Kansas City
- **November:** Keesen Landscape, Denver

#### 2018

- **May:** Columbia Landcare, Columbia, Missouri

#### 2019

- **February:** Hillenmeyer Landscape Services, Lexington, Kentucky
- **May:** JML Landscape, Pittsburgh
- **December:** Landscape Concepts, Grayslake, Illinois;
- **December:** Heritage Landscape Services, Bristow, Virginia

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# A BROADER REACH

The New Jersey-based business credits expanding its services and selling to a more diverse client base for its increased growth.

By Kim Lux

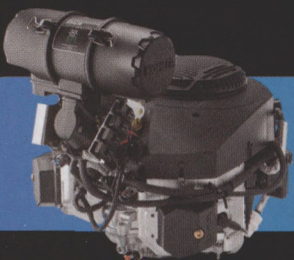
**IF THERE WAS A THEME FOR 2019** at Landscape Design Concepts, it would have to revolve around expansion. Not necessarily a building expansion, but widening the net when it comes to customers they want to catch. The change helped the company grow 35% in 2019 to produce \$29.2 million of revenue landing the Norwood, New Jersey-based company at **No. 71** on the 2019 Top 100 list.

President Mike Pierro attributes the company's success in 2019 to serving specifically more commercial clients.

"Before last year, we were selling primarily to corporate banks and other corporate buildings, like hospitals and medical buildings, Pierro says. "So, instead of just selling to those types of accounts, we started to sell to retail facilities," he says. "If you turn on the news, you hear that retail is going down, but we found that that's who was spending money on their properties, (and) in particular, high-end outdoor malls. So, we got very aggressive with selling to these luxury malls."



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**100**

**RANK: 71 REVENUE: \$29.2 MILLION**

THE TOP 100



Landscape Design Concepts President Mike Pierro says selling to retail facilities and expanding on existing services helped his company grow.

Pierro adds one of their largest new clients is a large shopping mall operator. "That was extremely successful," he says. "That really added to our growth."

**PROVIDING MORE OPPORTUNITIES.** Pierro adds that expanding the business's services also helped them to grow.

"We expanded on irrigation, outdoor kitchens for residential properties and we also started to sell more on flowers and plantings – so softscape," he says. "We did them before, but we started to do more exquisite work. For example, instead of putting in your basic Begonias, we'll do New Guineas or we'll do interior landscaping with flowers."

Pierro says he determined what services to expand on by looking at the data from previous years.

"Off of our sales from 2018, we saw there was room to grow in these areas," he says. "We've been asked before about doing irrigation repairs and irrigation installations in 2018, but it was something we declined. We decided to sub it out and thought we didn't have time to do it. Now, we incorporated an irrigation crew."

According to Pierro, promoting the outdoor kitchens also made sense as the company already had a construction crew.

Even while expanding, Pierro says there were some services they chose to pass on providing.

"One service we didn't expand on was chemicals," he said. "We usually sub that out. The work we're doing now is tedious enough, so to add new crews for chemical lawn work just wasn't worth it for us."

PHOTO COURTESY OF LANDSCAPE DESIGN CONCEPTS



# A cautious outlook

What worked for Landscape Design Concepts in 2019 may not work in 2020 because of COVID-19.

**WHILE SIGNING MORE** outdoor mall clients helped Landscape Design Concepts grow in 2019, President Mike Pierro says this might not continue in 2020 due to the coronavirus pandemic.

"I think we've had about 10 cancellations on jobs already," he says. "Some were our malls. So, what worked for us last year might not work this year as the malls are closed right now."

Pierro says that while the malls are shut down, maintenance isn't a top priority.

"I've noticed that malls, which usually spend about \$10,000 a month on maintenance, have cut back and are saying, 'Do the bare minimum to maintain until this goes by.' The retail stores have no idea how long this will last," he says.

However, the company has plenty of commercial clients that include hospitals and banks, and those businesses still need their properties serviced.

Pierro says he told his crews to expect the maintenance work to continue, but hardscape projects probably won't be starting up anytime soon.

"I told them to get ready to just have maintenance over the next six months," he says. "I really don't think we'll get into the hardscaping or softscaping work until maybe September."

Despite the uncertainty, Pierro says he's remaining optimistic.

"I'm not too worried because I think that as long as you have maintenance you should be OK," he says.

Despite the expansion, the Landscape Design Concepts team must still go out and sell the new services in order to see that increase in growth and revenue.

"Nobody really ever comes to us and says, 'This is exactly what I want to do.' It's usually

↓

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that they have an idea and then we have to sell our idea to them," he says. "They have an idea, but they don't know where exactly to put the money into their property."

**EASY STEPS TO FOLLOW.** Pierro says that reaching out to a broader client base and expanding services are two things any business can do in order to grow.

"If you can, look into expanding both your service base and the regions that you service," he says. "I've noticed that there are different markets for different regions. For example, in northern New Jersey, maintenance is a big spender for commercial and residential properties. Where in south New Jersey, there isn't as much grass and the bigger factor there is hardscaping and softscaping."

Pierro says that networking is another easy way to identify new clients. Some of the best advertising is word-of-mouth, and customers are often inclined to help their contractors find additional work if there's a close relationship. Good recommendations spread, and can help you establish a good, local reputation.

"If you do residential clients currently, start to build closer relationships with them," he says. "You'll realize that they have connections within different institutions and can connect you with different people. One person can connect you with one person, who can connect you to three people."

Making sure your team is filled with good leaders can also help, Pierro says.

"You need good foremen," he says. "We have guys driving 100 miles to go service 10 properties. If they get a flat tire on the highway, they can't be calling me and saying 'Oh, we need a tire.' You need a good foreman who can take initiative and knows their stuff. That's why our problems get resolved."

Paying those employees well goes hand in hand with having the best team possible.

"It all comes down to pay," he says. "We've had great workers that wanted to leave, not because they didn't like the job, but because they didn't like the pay. As long as they're vocal about that, I have no problem working through that. I noticed you can keep good help as long as you can pay them well." **L&L**



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**After 20 years, Ryan Lawn & Tree**  
is fully-employee owned, and the decision  
to do so became an excellent recruiting chip  
and company culture tool.

# Buying in

By Jimmy Miller







# Larry Ryan just wanted to do it right.

His company, Ryan Lawn & Tree, which ranks **No. 45** on Lawn & Landscape's 2020 Top 100 list, started the transition into an employee stock ownership plan (ESOP) in 1998. After 20 years of gradually working itself into becoming fully employee owned, Ryan says his company now recruits with an excellent sales pitch: Employees can become fully vested in the company after six years.

"We could've done it faster but if we would've sold out at a certain price when we were small, the payments were smaller in relationship to the total revenue," Ryan says. "We could've asked for a higher interest rate. We're just old farmers and making money is not what we're here for. We get more satisfaction seeing really good people work together rather than getting rich."

There's a lot a business needs to do before becoming an ESOP company. From managing the specific costs of making this leap to ensuring

your company is even ready, Ryan has a few recommendations for anyone interested in following his lead.

**FIRST THING'S FIRST.** Ryan didn't start the transition into an ESOP until his company had been in business for 11 years. He wanted to make sure his company was both large enough for an ESOP and had been building the right culture to embrace the plan.

"You really have to be a growing company to make it work," Ryan says. For reference, Ryan says a company would probably need to be around \$5 million in annual sales to make this work. He also says employees generally take around three years to fully buy in to a company's culture, though it only takes one year before an employee becomes eligible to get into an ESOP.

Ryan says that some employees may always be hazy on the details, even years down the road of working for the company, so they might not get involved. But generally, he estimates most of his employees sign up after two years of working for the company.

"Because we've integrated everything together and we're truly committed to our people, even when we were less than 100%, they bought in," Ryan says. "If you have a bunch of bad people who do not feel good about the company, it is not a good situation. If you do it well, it will certainly pay off."

**FINDING THE RIGHT PEOPLE.** Of course, Ryan says recruiting is a key element to this. He says they have 315 employees from 69 different universities, and not all of them are horticulture grads. Ryan says companies need to figure out how to find employees in places they might not ordinarily recruit. Ryan himself spent time in the restaurant business, for example.



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THE TOP 100



Larry Ryan says higher wages and a strong ESOP plan are excellent recruiting tools.

“Early on, we brought in some gifted and very sharp people,” Ryan says. “We almost don’t care about what the degree is in. We care about where their heart is.”

When the company started 33 years ago, Ryan was his one – and only – employee. Two years later, he hired his first full-time worker, who is still with the company all these years later. Ryan says that companies must be willing to show employees that they’re invested in them by offering wages that are higher than most neighboring companies. To do this, Ryan says they charge roughly double per lawn than his largest competitors in the area. Given that 35% of the company’s work is tree care, he also feels that his employees should be fairly compensated for the additional safety precautions they must take.

“You know there are people who won’t pay it,” he says. “But, it hasn’t hurt our growth at all. We need to be charging the value of our product because there’s a lot of risk in what we do.”

Ryan says that recruiting now is easier than before they can talk about the established culture, which for Ryan Lawn & Tree does include a faith-based element. He says this has helped them also recruit high quality people. Plus, he shares that many employees who stick around have well over \$100,000 in their ESOP accounts.

“That makes their eyes pop open,” he says.



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## DIVERSE RECRUITING

LARRY RYAN SAYS THEY HAVE 315 EMPLOYEES FROM 69 DIFFERENT UNIVERSITIES, AND NOT ALL OF THEM ARE HORTICULTURE GRADS.



**THE NEXT STEP.** Once a company gets an employee on board, they also need to feel like they're a part of the decision-making process in order to really buy in.

"You get employee buy-in if people truly feel like they're an owner," Ryan says. "I own 10 shares of IBM, but the president doesn't come to me to ask for advice. You try to listen to your employees as much as you can."

For Ryan, he says that the process should be gradual and deliberate when setting up the ESOP. From 1998 to 2004, they gave 20% of the company to the employees. After that, they sold in two 40% increments over the next several years.

Ryan says they followed the Great Game of Business model, which includes hiring consultants to help set up the ESOP and educate the employees on all the different steps of financial management for the company.

He also readily admits the process isn't

Ryan says anybody is welcome to reach out to him for guidance at [larryryan@ryanlawn.com](mailto:larryryan@ryanlawn.com).

pain-free, and it requires an open mind from the company owner before they launch into an ESOP. They're expensive and time-consuming to set up, and company leaders need to be ready to do annual payout for people who leave. Ryan says each employee also needs to be looked at as a partner, and if company leadership isn't willing to do that, things could get ugly.

"(Owners) may not know their place in their own company. You're going to lose some control," Ryan says. "If there's a selfishness in management, they'll see it. If there's an arrogance in management, people will see right through it." **L&L**



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# BUYING AND SELLING IN A PANDEMIC

Mergers and acquisition experts weigh in on how the virus is affecting current and future deals.

By Brian Horn

The booming market for mergers and acquisitions in the green industry has been slowed down by COVID-19, but it hasn't been shutdown. Will it get any worse? And what will the market look like when the country's economy recovers?

We reached out to five M&A professionals in the green industry to answer those questions and more. The information in this article is taken from interviews conducted around March 31 and follow-up interviews conducted between April 20-22. The original story can be read by visiting [bit.ly/mergercovid](http://bit.ly/mergercovid).

## Q: How is COVID-19 affecting mergers and acquisitions activity?

**Greg Clendenin:** Across virtually all industries, M&A activity has slowed down, especially in terms of new transactions coming in. With the green industry being labeled as an essential service (and it is), it has not been affected as much as others. However, that is not to say that it isn't significant.

**Brian Corbett:** While activity is still lighter, with more daily talk of being past peak outbreak in many key areas and the opening of the economy, it seems all walks of life, including buyers, are more willing to engage in conversations. Specific to the green industry, we have spoken with all the main buyers and they are all committed to their businesses and long-term growth objectives. We are advancing several transactions forward and while we do not expect the pace of the process to mimic pre-COVID timelines with continued limited travel, etc., we do see things moving forward.

**Ron Edmonds:** During the first three weeks of March, we mostly saw buyers (along with most everyone else) looking internally and, after ensuring the safety of their own teams, re-evaluating what the impact of COVID-19 on their access to capital, investment strategies and processes. We continue to have many investor inquiries. While dealing with bank-

ers is a challenge right now, since many are overwhelmed by the stimulus programs and also troubled loans, some incentives apply to businesses doing deals now – like the provisions that have the SBA making six months of payments for borrowers apply to new borrowers through September 27, 2020, in addition to existing SBA loan borrowers. That is potentially very meaningful.

**Jeff Harkness:** We have seen a slowing approach from buyers on funding deals only during the late March and April COVID-19 pandemic. Most of our clients and strategic buying groups have operated and performed remarkably well during the last 30 days. Essential status, paycheck protection funds and great leadership has driven solid performance despite some short-term uncertainty. In the meantime, our remote meetings, packaging and conversations continue as most groups believe there will be some impact on performance in Q2 but they're still excited about acquiring our top companies.

**Tom Fochtman:** M&A has not ground to a halt but pretty close. We need positive movement with the COVID-19 situation in order to get our economies going again and that includes buyers purchasing landscape companies again. Ceibass has told most if its clients to hunker down, focus on best practices, keep your team intact, make money so that they produce a highly profitable 2020. For the companies that we either have to market or were close to taking to market, don't plan on it happening in 2020. It may, but don't need for it to happen this year. It's more important to produce a good year that they will be rewarded for, most likely in 2021. All of this assumes landscape remains essential in most states and that landscape companies are able to produce solid revenue.

## Q: How has this affected any deals you had in progress?

**GC:** It has not affected transactions that we have in process either in the valuation or in the process continuing. Some deals in terms





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## M&A

of the process may be affected when the process gets to a point when travel is desired by the buyer, but I see some deals closing without any travel. That can be done without any real negative impact on the deal related to travel restrictions. Technologically, we live in a small world. The transactions more at risk are the larger ones where the buyer may want to be on-site before the closing and that is understandable on the large deals. Some buyers will be willing to complete due diligence via email and video and audio conferencing and then close without being physically together with the seller.

**BC:** We pulled one specific transaction but are working behind the scenes to ensure we are at the front of the line when things have truly opened back up. We ran a small but highly competitive process so while we will certainly revisit conversations with the group we'd locked up with, there are other interested parties for them and for any good company. We are moving several transactions forward and are finding that for the right companies in the right markets, there is still a great amount of interest.

**RE:** We believe the deals that we have in process are likely to get done, but they are getting slowed down. Things are continuing to move forward and picking up a bit as companies move beyond initial shocks and the economy prepares to restart. I also have clients actively working in business plans to start new businesses.

**JH:** We have actually seen an increase in interest from groups looking to enter the industry. A couple current deals have pushed closings back 60 days, and there has been increased diligence regarding customer segments and short-term forecasting. Still, we have not had buyers leaving opportunities, nor experienced a slow-down in communication.

**TF:** My most recent example is currently moving forward. We are under a Letter of Intent and in due diligence. I'm speaking to potential buyers about our clients, but the market won't really pick up a lot until people can travel. Interestingly we are going to see a shift with a lot of what was normal face to face go virtual. I think we could get to a point where a transaction can be consummated without buyer and seller meeting prior to closing. Not sure when that occurs but sooner than later. The M&A landscape is adapting just like other businesses are or will learn to in times of a pandemic.

**Q: Do you think this will slow down the M&A long-term?**

**GC:** Short-term, there could be a drop in the multiples of revenue and EBITDA that we have become used to in recent years. New accounts coming onboard are slowing and that will hinder the growth and profit of companies and those things obviously have an impact on valuations. But, as I said, that is short term. This industry is driven by need. Landscapes will continue to need maintenance. It will be back as strong as ever and M&A activity will come back as well. Now, having said all that, some companies are still experiencing significant growth



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**RON EDMONDS,**  
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Principium Group

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partner,  
Three Point Group

**TOM FOCHTMAN,**  
CEO, Ceibass  
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and profit increase. I have two clients that are having exceptional performance year-to-date. One was up 49% in the first quarter over same quarter last year and the other was up

52% in March, and April is also going very well for both companies.

**BC:** The good news is that all of our clients have been deemed essential and are work-

ing. Now the key is to see how well they hold up financially. Assuming their financial performance is up, flat or close to, it will be a great selling point that the industry and the services provided are in fact essential to the economy and thus can withstand recessions and worldwide events like COVID-19 better than others. If this holds true, we'll have a strong case that while there might be a very short-term discount in the midst of unprecedented economic disruption, that the best-in-class companies that we represent still have tremendous value.

**RE:** I think things will be slower for all of 2020, but there will be many signs of life. Some historic buyers will continue to be overly cautious, but others are pushing forward. The bubble has not burst – at least not yet.

**JH:** There is still a tremendous amount of dry powder (capital) that needs to be deployed. We will continue to have a very favorable low interest rate environment and access to financing both from commercial lenders and alternative financing sources (i.e. – private credit/debt funds and certain underlying dynamics which have been driving M&A in the industry to this point will continue. Market chaos breeds opportunity. The recent reduction of interest rates to near zero will help fuel deal activity, especially on larger transactions with market leading companies once the impact from the coronavirus begins to wane.

**TF:** I do not. The landscape fundamentals are still very strong, especially the reoccurring revenue nature of landscape maintenance and in particular, commercial maintenance. This rather sudden and unintended recession, by most economists' accounts, is not projected to be that long – maybe up to 18 months. Unless COVID-19 rages and can't be controlled, and unless it does not work itself out as predicted, I think the M&A markets in general will return to normalcy and be very active. This might even create a little bit of a frenzy once buyers can travel and get transactions in their pipeline.

Continues on pg. 81

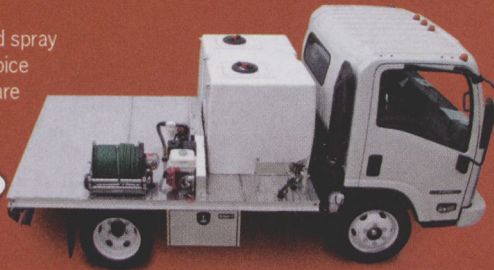
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# choices, choices

With so many mower attachments out there, landscapers need to know what will work best for them. **By Kim Lux**

**W**hether it's a new company starting out or a well-established one looking to streamline operations, mower attachments can help with efficiency.

Companies don't have to buy the biggest, most expensive attachments to improve that efficiency, according to Pete McNamara, general manager of Dependable Lawn Care in Blue Island, Illinois, and Ryan Panarese, landscape & snow manager with Constantine Property Management, in Loudonville, New York.

**VARIETY IS THE SPICE OF LIFE.** McNamara says his inventory includes mulching kits and some other useful tools, including a tow-behind aerator, power rake, catchers, fertilizer spreaders and a tow-behind spraying attachment for pesticide control.

"Most of the implementations we have are attachments for a walk-behind machine where a person could stand on it," he says. "A lot of the other attachments are for mulching – things you would put on the deck itself to

mulch the grass in the summertime."

Constantine Property Management also utilizes mulching kits quite a bit.

"All of my machines have mulching kits and striping kits on them," Panarese says. "On our bigger machines, we have a dethatching rake and blower buggy."

When it comes to choosing an attachment, McNamara says adaptability is key.

"It all depends on how inventive you want to get," he says. "The more versatile you can be with one piece of equipment, is the way you want to go."

Getting work done faster is an added benefit of having the attachments on hand.

"It saves us from having to get additional pieces, but it also saves hours," Panarese says, adding he has a blower attachment to save time on a job. "I don't have to have a guy out there pushing a push blower."

**SEASONAL SUPPLIES.** Panarese says his rake attachments comes in handy for spring cleanups.

"It gets all the organic material that settles

in the grass from the winter," he says. "It gives the lawn a nice, clean appearance."

McNamara says a catcher and attachments for towing can also be good seasonal tools.

"Obviously, your catcher is another main attachment," he says. "Basically, it's what we mostly implement in the springtime. We're in a suburb of Chicago, so obviously the grass growth changes. In the springtime, the grass has a lot of growth versus the summer when growth is a little more dormant. There's no way to mulch anything when the grass is wet. It's just not practical."

Dependable Lawn Care uses wheel attachments as well.

"We've experimented with different types of wheels too," he says. "They're making all different kinds to lessen the impact on the turf."

**EYEING FUTURE BUYS.** Panarese says he's looking to add more attachments to his fleet.

"We are certainly looking into buying an aerator," he says. "I've got to rent it now. Some of the lawns we have now are pretty big in square footage and using one of those little walk-behind ones is like bringing a spoon to the beach."

McNamara says that as a landscape maintenance company, he doesn't need too many attachments.

"What we use here is just to improve upon what the machine is meant to do – mow," he says. "Up here, you don't have too much more time to do anything other than mow."

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“The more versatile you can be with one piece of equipment, is the way you want to go.”

PETE MCNAMARA, GM, Dependable Lawn Care



“Especially for these smaller businesses where it’s just a one-person operation, they don’t need to walk for 14 hours a day. They need to be as efficient as possible.”

Another piece of advice both men have is to do your research before purchasing anything.

“Do your homework and research the piece of equipment,” he says. “Different manufacturers have different things. You might buy a \$400 attachment that isn’t feasible for the piece of equipment you have.”

“I look at a couple of things,” Panarese says. “I might think this will be a great piece of equipment to have right this second for a particular job. But once it’s over, did it pay for itself already? Or do I have to sell more to justify having it? Should I just rent it? If it costs me \$500 a month to rent and \$5,000 to buy, and I need to rent it three to four times a year, then I need to purchase it.” **L&L**

**DO YOUR DUE DILIGENCE.** Panarese and McNamara suggest companies just starting out consider how attachments could help them better provide services.

“The ability to identify what you want to do as far as services will dictate what attachments you could use,” McNamara says. “For a smaller crew, you’re all about volume.”

Panarese says for the companies with smaller crews, the attachments will be a major time saver.

“If it can go on the machine and it costs less than \$1,000, by all means, certainly get it. It’ll pay for itself fairly quickly. It’s also not another motorized piece of equipment that you have to store and service,” he says.

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Nate Tackett, Project Manager - RJ Lawn & Landscape

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# DOLLARS GONE & GOING

Find out what lawn care operators bought last year, and what they plan on buying this year.

**LCOs definitely favor** granular fertilizer over liquid, while combination products fall in the middle between granular and liquid. Those are just a couple of takeaways from the survey results on the right.

The following information was pulled from Lawn & Landscape's Expenditure Survey, which was taken by almost 500 industry professionals. Information was collected in late January of 2020. The percentages here reflect the number of respondents who said they were purchasing these products.





● PURCHASED LAST 12 MONTHS

● PURCHASED NEXT 12 MONTHS

HERBICIDES: POST-EMERGENT

56% → 48%

HERBICIDES: PRE-EMERGENT

55% → 48%

HERBICIDES: NON-SELECTIVE

56% → 48%

FERTILIZER/PESTICIDE COMBO PRODUCTS

55% → 46%

FERTILIZERS: GRANULAR

73% → 61%

FERTILIZERS: LIQUID

38% → 33%

FUNGICIDES

37% → 32%

BIOLOGICALS

12% → 11%

INSECTICIDES

43% → 36%

PLANT GROWTH REGULATORS

15% → 14%

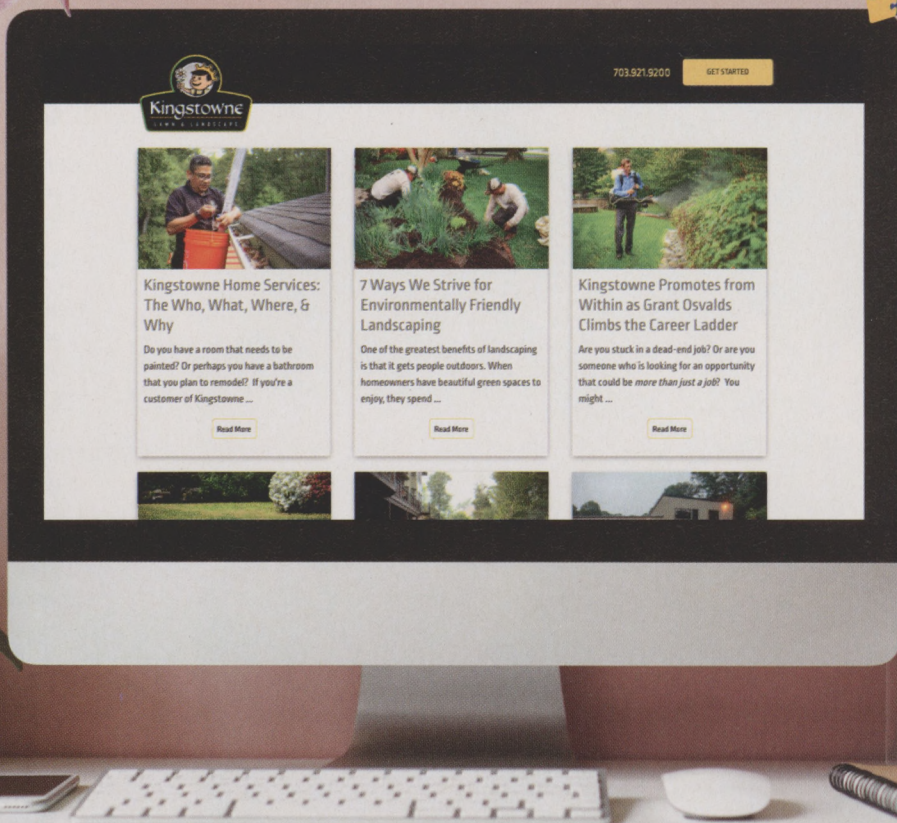
MOSQUITO CONTROL PRODUCTS

17% → 17%

TREE CARE PRODUCTS

29% → 26%





# THE RIGHT SITE

Investments in your website can enhance your overall business.

By Kim Lux

A dynamic website can improve any business.

Matt Preuss, owner of Cutting Edge Landscape Design, of Los Alamitos, California, and Krisjan Berzins, owner and CEO of Kingstowne Lawn & Landscape, of Alexandria, Virginia, sing the praises of what a new, updated site can do for a company.

**MONTHS IN THE MAKING.** For Preuss, the process started after he received something in the mail from a digital marketing agency.

“I got a flyer in the mail to do a website

audit. That was two years ago last summer,” he says. “We were at a turning point in our business, where we needed that fresh, new look. Our website through the years had different people putting their hands on it, and it got us through. But we never had that professional look we wanted.”

Preuss says he worked with the consultants for about six months, brainstorming ideas for the new website.

“We had Zoom video conferences for about six months, talking about what are the priorities of my business, what are the priorities of

my life and what do I want out of landscaping and design work,” he says.

Berzins says he also worked with a consultant to revamp his company’s site. The whole process took him about nine months.

“It was probably about three years ago or so that I started the process,” he says. “The site we had at the time was probably six to seven years old, which doesn’t sound like much, but in the technology world a lot changes. So, that’s relatively old.”

Berzins said that he found his new consultants by doing some research after the previous site’s designers quoted him a very high price for a website revamp.

“We spent a tremendous amount of money on the old site and it was very customized,” he says.

“It was a little clunky on the back end in terms of seeing analytics and being able to see traffic to the site. It was there, but it wasn’t easy for us to go in and make changes. We had to keep going to them and they’d bill us.”



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
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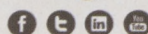
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~ Cheryl Burks, Gro Lawn Inc., Fort Worth, TX



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Berzins said the site was moved from WordPress over to HubSpot, which he says has helped with search engine optimization (SEO).

**STANDING APART.** Preuss said having the website sell his company and his vision was his main objective.

“I wanted my customer to go to it and read about us, understand our process, look at the pictures and submit a form because there’s no one else out there who’s going to deliver a backyard like us,” he says.

“I wanted the website to sell me before I even had to show up.”

Additionally, to set himself apart, Preuss also worked to revitalize his company’s logo.

“I created the logo myself 18 years ago, and I wanted someone who had the marketing background to say, ‘This is how you expand

it and focus in on a better clientele.’ It’s amazing to see that by just changing it slightly, and changing the font, the different types of clients we get now,” he says.

Berzins says having organic traffic, meaning visitors who land on a website as a result of unpaid searches, and SEO were very important to him.

“Sites need to be built a certain way in terms of SEO in order to show up on Google on page one,” he says.

According to Berzins, “the organic traffic has gone through the roof” since the revamp.

Making sure his company’s work was front and center was also a priority for Berzins.

“I was always adamant about having our own pictures of our own work and not just stock photos,” he says. “Until three years ago, we never had any professional photography done. It was always just us with a

camera or cellphone. That was a big part of what I wanted.”

Berzins says Kingstowne’s redesign let the company’s reputation speak for itself online.

“In our industry, a lot of companies boast about awards they’ve won, all the trucks they have, their beautiful facility, all things that are nice but in the grand scheme of things are only small pieces of the puzzle for a customer,” he says. “It sounds obvious, but it should be about the customer and not bragging about how great you are.”

**EXPENSIVE, BUT ESSENTIAL.** While completely upgrading a website isn’t cheap, Berzins and Preuss both said it’s a smart business decision.

“It’s been great,” Preuss says. “It has transformed my business. From a monetary standpoint, I was always a \$1 or \$1.5 million

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“I wanted the website to sell me before I even had to show up.”

MATT PREUSS, owner, Cutting Edge Landscape Design

business. Since the website, I'm a \$2.5 or \$3 million business. It's just doubled everything.”

But as the saying goes, you have to spend money to make money.

“It's not cheap, but if you're going to have a website that stands out over your competition, you've got to put the time, money and effort into it,” he says. “You're going to get the value back pretty quickly.”

Preuss says the website is one aspect of the advertising budget he'd never sacrifice.

“We spend \$100,000 a year on advertising. It's the number one thing I wouldn't cut out of a budget,” he says. “Us landscapers can get to a point where we think we don't need to advertise, but I think if you stop marketing yourself, you'll become a dinosaur. You just don't cut website, and that kind of advertising, out ever.”

**HELPFUL FOR HIRING.** Preuss and Berzins say their new websites have had unexpected bonuses.

“It's helped with recruiting,” he says. “I've had applicants say, ‘I looked at your site and it looks like an awesome place to work.’ Some companies may have a cool culture but not ways to promote it. It wasn't really a goal but looking back it's a big part of the website.”

Preuss says he also has plans to increase recruiting through his website.

“We're coming up with a career page and going back to revamp a couple of other things,” he says. “We'll always trying to recruit talent and new designers to work for us.”

**WORTH THE WORK.** If anyone is on the fence about improving their site, Berzins recommends taking the leap.

“We had what we thought was a great site and it looked cool, but it didn't have the messaging we needed, the high-quality photography we needed, and it wasn't promoting our culture,” Berzins says.


Preuss says he'd advise companies to work with a consultant and to make sure they find the right fit.

“Do your research on finding the right website designer and find the person who can virtually put their arm around you and talk

to you about your strengths and weaknesses as an individual and as a company,” he says.


Berzins says if that person has experience with the green industry, that's even better.

“If you're looking for a company to build you a new website, I'd say very few will know anything about our industry,” he says. “If you can find one who does, that's a home run.” **L&L**



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**The pitch:** The new Cat 306 CR Mini Excavator marks Caterpillar's entry in the six-ton class offering.

- Delivers performance of up to 7,839 lbs. at a 9.8-foot radius.
- Enhanced uphill swing torque and increased cycle times provide greater productivity and efficiency.
- With its long stick option, the 306 CR delivers a maximum dig depth of 162 inches and 15,821-pound maximum operating weight when equipped with the sealed and pressurized cab.
- With the touch of a button, the operator can switch from conventional lever/foot-pedal steering controls to the standard, CAT-exclusive Stick Steer system.

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



## VERMEER CTX160 MINI SKID-STEER

**The pitch:** Vermeer is expanding its line of mini skid-steers with the addition of the powerful and compact Vermeer CTX160 mini skid-steer.

- Features a rated operating capacity of 1,600 pounds, 16.7 gallons per minute of auxiliary hydraulic flow and a width of 42 inches.
- The CTX160 provides high lifting capabilities while remaining compact and nimble to operate. This mini skid-steer can handle jobs such as moving heavy material, working ground-engaging attachments and efficiently maneuvering in congested operating conditions.
- The Vermeer CTX160 is sized for challenging landscaping, hardscaping, rental, utility and general construction work.

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



A man wearing orange ear protection, safety glasses, and a high-visibility vest is using a STIHL hedge trimmer to trim a large green bush. The trimmer is orange and black with a battery pack on the side. The background shows more greenery and a building.

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## ECHO'S CSG-7410 CUT-OFF SAW

**The pitch:** ECHO's cut-off saw offers high cutting torque, giving contractors more power and durability for tough hardscape jobs.

- Powered by a 73.5 cc 2-stroke professional-grade engine, the CSG-7410 provides more torque at the wheel due to a 2.6:1 drive ratio.
- Contains a reversible cutting arm with a standard position for normal cutting and a reversed position to cut close to buildings or ground obstacles.
- Easy to start due to the spring-assist starter, decompression valve, choke with automatic fast idle and purge bulb.

**For more info:** Echo-usa.com

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## TORO DINGO TX 1000

**The pitch:** Toro has taken another step in innovation, performance and versatility with the Dingo TX 1000.

- Designed with vertical lift loader arms, its 1,000-pound rated operating capacity delivers quality performance.
- The Dingo TX 1000 also offers increased reach at full height for maximum jobsite productivity.
- This lightweight, maneuverable machine packs strength and reach in a compact package.

**For more info:** Toro.com



## KUBOTA SCL 100 STAND-ON TRACK LOADER

**The pitch:** The new SCL1000 features a 9.8-inch track that comes standard on the 36-inch machine.

- The SCL1000 has a 24.8 horsepower Kubota diesel engine and a travel speed of 5.1 miles per hour.
- The loader arms have a hinge pin height of 84.7 inches and a reach of 25.9 inches at a 45-degree dump angle.
- It will be available at select authorized Kubota dealers in the second half of 2020.

**For more info:** KubotaUSA.com



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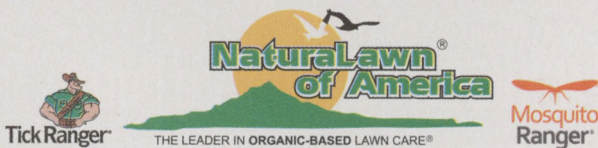


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**DESIGN/BUILD**



**STEINER SLIP SCOOP ATTACHMENT**

**The pitch:** Powered by the versatile, all-season Steiner 450 tractor, the Steiner slip scoop tractor attachment does the heavy lifting for you, making small excavation projects, landscaping and yard or farm projects effortless.

- The hydraulic operation makes lifting loose material and yard debris easy.
- The optional scarifier wear edge breaks up hard material in preparation for removal or grading.
- It comes in two available widths, 48-inch and 52-inch, so you can get the right tool for the job.

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



**TAKEUCHI TL6R COMPACT TRACK LOADER**

**The pitch:** The smallest track loader in the Takeuchi lineup, the TL6R is perfect for the landscaping space with its ability to get into tight areas.

- The Takeuchi TL6R Compact Track Loader (CTL) is an agile, compact machine that is easy to transport. The TL6R is ideal for customers in the agricultural, general contracting, landscaping and rental industries.
- Powered by a Kubota 2.4-liter, 65.2 horsepower engine, the TL6R features a radial lift loader design with a maximum lift height of 9 feet, 6.4 inches, and a rated operating capacity of 1,841 pounds. Additionally, the TL6 has a width of 5 feet and a height of 6 feet, 5.8 inches.
- The TL6 features a newly designed cabin with an overhead 5.7-inch color multi-information display and backlit rocker switches that control a variety of machine functions.
- Takeuchi Fleet Management telematics system is standard and provides a variety of data points including machine health and condition, run time and machine location.

**For more info:** [Takeuchi-us.com](http://Takeuchi-us.com).





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- It features integrated electro-hydraulic controls, which are operated using the host machine's joysticks, allowing the operator to work from the safety and comfort of the cab.
- Maximum digging depth with the BH130 is 9.75 feet and reach at ground level from the swing pivot pin is 13.25 feet.

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




## GEORIPPER MINI TRENCHER

**The pitch:** For employees stuck at home or companies working with a skeleton crew, GeoRipper is an efficient, productive option.

- GeoRipper is a light-weight, portable trencher that can dig up to 27 inches deep and 2 inches wide.
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- It cuts through roots up to 3 inches in diameter and removes rocks up to 4 inches.

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





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- The machine is equipped with heavy-duty, adjustable plow blades to meet fiber installation-depth requirements and improve longevity.
- A variable flow control helps operators precisely control the flow to the shaker box and adjust ground drive speed for varying ground conditions, improving overall productivity.

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

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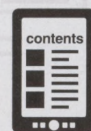
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**TRENCHERS**



**LITTLE BEAVER KWIK-TRENCH  
KT 200B AND KT 2400B**

**The pitch:** These mini trenchers are both able to trench up to 30 feet per minute and can achieve rotation speed up to 800 rpm.

- Featuring carbide-tipped teeth and a powerful drive system, the mini-trencher cuts through tough surfaces such as compacted clay, road fill, asphalt and tree roots up to 10 inches thick.
- Powered by a 5.5-horsepower Honda engine, the KT 200B is capable of achieving depths up to 8 inches. The KT 2400B can reach 12 inches deep with an 8-horsepower engine.
- Durable construction and components allow the Kwik-Trench to tackle a multitude of projects, including landscape edging and root pruning.

**For more info:** Littlebeaver.com



**STEINER TRENCHER ATTACHMENT**

**The pitch:** The Steiner Trencher attachment helps you dig precise trenches quickly, providing a boost to your landscaping efforts.

- It can cut as deep as 28 inches and it features an easy-to-see depth indicator gauge, so you're always in control, right in the operator seat.
- Attached to the Steiner 450 tractor, the Steiner Trencher has a standard cutting width of 5½ inches but can also dig as narrow as 4¾ inches. Its precise width and depth make it perfect for installing lighting, irrigation, pet fences, or aiding in other landscape renovation projects.
- With its 550 foot-per-minute chain speed, it is designed to cut through tough terrain.

**For more info:** Steinerturf.com

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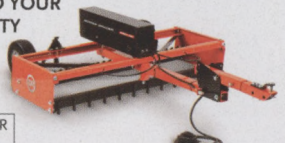
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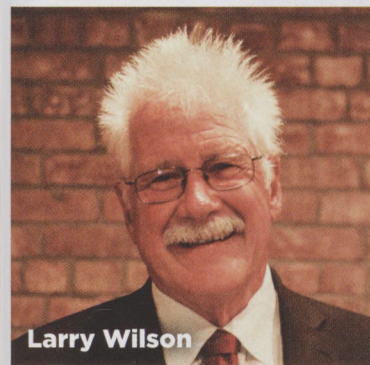
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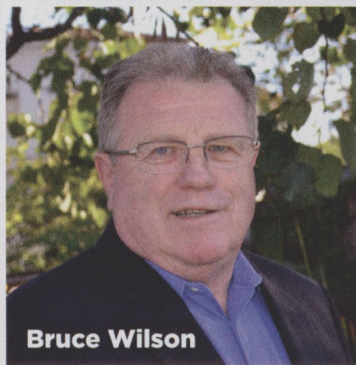
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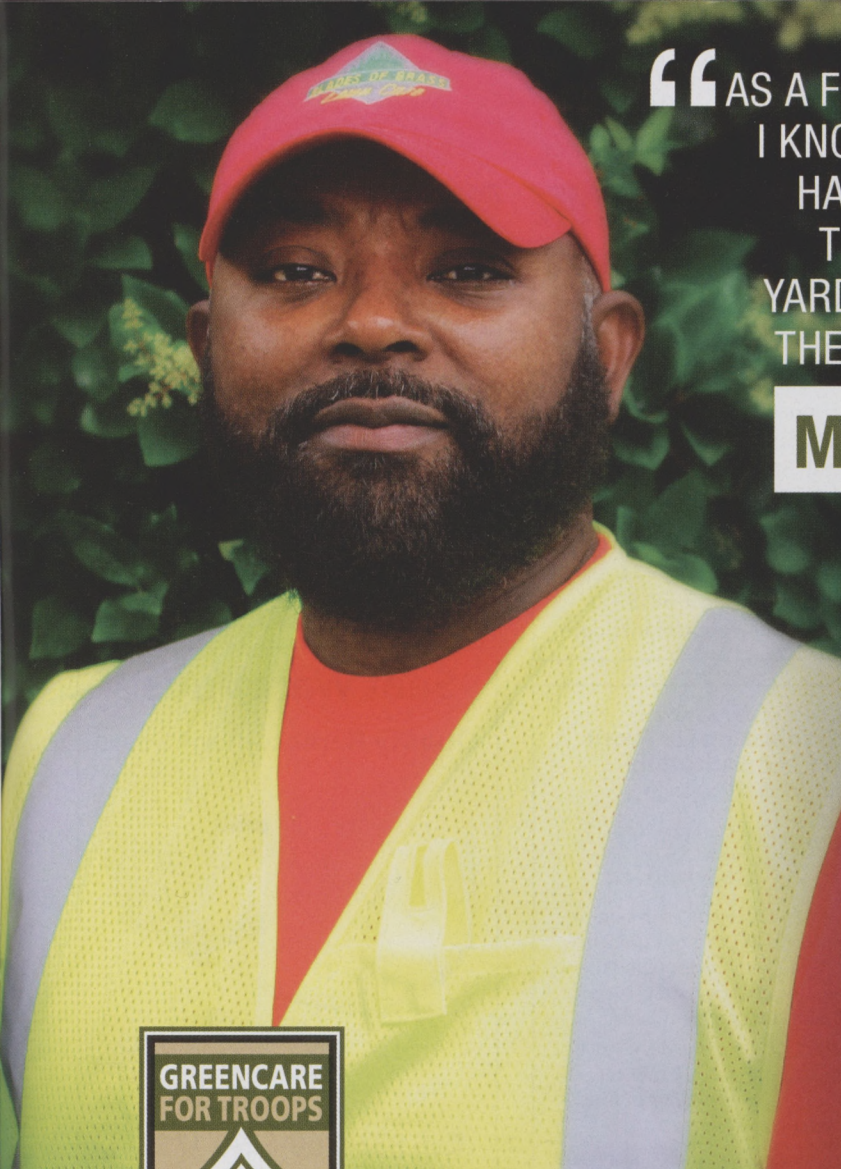
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AD INDEX

| Advertiser                       | Website                   | Page #         |
|----------------------------------|---------------------------|----------------|
| American Honda                   | honda.com                 | 67             |
| Ariens/Gravelly                  | gravelly.com              | 2-3            |
| Barreto MFG                      | barretomfg.com            | 48             |
| Belgard Oldcastle APG            | belgard.com/l&l           | 55             |
| Bobcat Company                   | bobcat.com/l/buildquote   | 27             |
| Carbon Earth Co.                 | carbearth.com             | 61             |
| Ceibass Venture Partners         | ceibass.com               | 42             |
| Corteva Agriscience              | corteva.us                | 23             |
| CoxReels                         | coxreels.com              | 16             |
| DB Mower Innovations             | dbmower.com               | 32             |
| DeerPro                          | deerproprofessional.com   | 20             |
| DeWitt Co.                       | dewittcompany.com         | 54             |
| DR Power Equipment               | drpower.com               | 20, 74         |
| Exmark                           | exmark.com                | 83             |
| Finn Corporation                 | finndealers.com           | 15, 17, 19, 21 |
| Gowan Company                    | gowanco.com               | 34             |
| Graham Spray Equipment           | grahamse.com              | 50             |
| Greene County Fertilizer Company | greeneountyfert.com       | 16             |
| Gregson-Clark                    | gregsonclark.com          | 12             |
| Horizon                          | horizononline.com         | 47             |
| Hunter Industries                | hunterindustries.com      | 84             |
| Hustler Turf Equipment           | hustlerturf.com           | 51             |
| Isotunes Audio                   | isotunes.com              | 66             |
| John Deere Company               | johndeere.com/mowpro      | 49             |
| John Deere Construction          | johndeere.com/rentalsales | 62-63          |
| JRCO                             | jrcoinc.com/LAL           | 18             |
| Kawasaki Motors Corp             | kawasak enginesusa.com    | 8,9            |

| Advertiser                 | Website                                          | Page #   |
|----------------------------|--------------------------------------------------|----------|
| Kiofi Tractor              | kioti.com                                        | 10-11    |
| Kohler Co                  | kohlerpower.com                                  | 33, 37   |
| Kubota                     | kubotausa.com                                    | 44-45    |
| Lawn Creations Enterprises | lawncreationsusa.com                             | 68       |
| Lebanon Turf Products      | lebanonturf.com                                  | 14       |
| Little Beaver, Inc.        | littlebeaver.com                                 | 35       |
| LYTX                       | lytx.com                                         | 5        |
| Mean Green Products        | meangreenmowers.com                              | 68       |
| Mini Trencher              | minitrencher.com                                 | 60       |
| NaturaLawn                 | naturalawnfranchise.com                          | 68       |
| Neely Coble Co             | neelycoble.com                                   | 69       |
| Northeast CAT Group        | necatdealers.com                                 | 75*      |
| Novae Corp                 | gridironcts.com                                  | 18       |
| PBI-Gordon Corp            | pbigordonturf.com                                | 53*      |
| Perma-Green Supreme        | permagreen.com                                   | 7        |
| Permaloc Aluminum Edging   | permaloc.com                                     | 71       |
| Progressive                | progressivecommercial.com                        | 13       |
| Real Green Systems         | realgreen.com/mobilegrow                         | 59       |
| Savalawn                   | savatree.com                                     | 38       |
| Smart Rain                 | smartrain.net                                    | 76       |
| Software Republic          | raincad.com                                      | 38       |
| STIHL                      | stihlusa.com/products/battery-products/ap-series | 65       |
| Techo- Bloc                | techo-bloc.com                                   | 25       |
| TruFuel                    | trufuel50.com                                    | 72       |
| Turbo Technologies         | turboturf.com                                    | 48       |
| Uline                      | uline.com                                        | 32       |
| Vermeer Corporation        | vermeer.com/miniskids                            | 39,41,43 |

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Continued from pg. 50

Financial buyers do not like being idle. They have committed money that needs to be invested.

**Q: What advice do you have for companies who were looking to buy or sell?**

**GC:** If it is time for you to sell, then don't stop the process. It doesn't mean you're going to sell now or when valuations are temporarily down, but the acquisition process takes some time. Go ahead and get those things done that you will need to do, with the advice of your advisor, so when it is time for you to close and close on the price and terms you like, then you will be ready to complete the process without starting from the beginning. During this temporary challenging period, press on.

**BC:** Hopefully by now everyone has figured out how to operate safely within the guidelines that have been put forth and communicated to their teams and their clients exactly what they are doing. Now, we need the focus on isolating the effects of COVID-19 in terms of financial performance. It will be critical to demonstrate where your company was before the outbreak and widespread closure of the economy, what you did in cost-cutting and other moves to protect your client retention, revenues, earnings, etc.

Only companies with good data, systems and tracking will be able to do this in specific terms. We feel this will be very important rather than taking the easy way out and assuming buyers will just understand that it was COVID and thus not ideal circumstances.

**RE:** There is always demand for good businesses, but it is even more important than ever to make sure you are ready to go through the scrutiny that will come with a business sale process. This is a great time for business owners to do some self-evaluation and identify those areas they can work on to make sure that buyers will consider their business very desirable. One of the things that I discovered years ago, especially during the Great Recession, is that there are always more buyers than sellers. That doesn't mean it may not get harder to get deals done or that valuations may not fluctuate, but there are buyers. Take advantage of opportunities to pick up talent that might come from market disruption.

**JH:** Seek professional advice so you can have all the facts in an emotional time. Valuation, deal structure, balance sheet impact, taxes and net cash to sellers can be measured – so can forecasting future opportunity costs, EBITDA and value. We know all the players. Get educated, then develop a clear plan for next 1-3 years including some contingencies. While there is some uncertainty ahead such as pending elections, potentially higher taxes, labor challenges and some slowing in the economy, there still is significant opportunity. Don't guess. Get a plan.

**TF:** It may not happen for them in 2020. Those companies should stay the course, focus on building and growing a profitable enterprise and stay focused. If need be, use whatever governmental stimulus is available and work their plan. If they were trending positively, they need to show another year of progress and good profitability and progress on any new initiatives that they might have undertaken. **L&L**

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## STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

# Stephanie Jocius

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

By Jimmy Miller



**When Stephanie Jocius** was in Grade 11 – the Canadian equivalent to a student’s junior year in high school – she led a “Celebritrees” guided hike in a local provincial park, telling attendees all about the park’s types of trees.

Jocius admits that the dozen or so adults walking alongside her had good, tough questions, but she also had good answers. She had always loved being outside, as she worked in the local Erie Gardens as early as 2010 and started working for the park in 2015.

But after the guided tree tour, it started to resonate with Jocius just how much she might enjoy a career in horticulture. That’s when she applied to the Niagara Parks Commission School of Horticulture, which accepts only 12 students per year.

“When I applied, I submitted an application and then they contacted me for an interview. Then we had a one-hour exam to write,” Jocius says. “I definitely thought after the interview that I completely messed up my chance to get in. When they finally got back to me, it was amazing.”

Now, after completing her ornamental horticulture degree in March, Jocius is looking at a turbulent job market: The COVID-19 pandemic has eliminated several positions and internships for which she might’ve otherwise applied. She’s weighing between going back for further plant studies education at a school in Alberta, working in botanical gardens anywhere in North America, or even working for some of her former classmates at their landscaping companies back closer to home.

In other words, she’s keeping her options wide open.

“It’s all that you can really do,” she says.

Jocius says that despite her next career step being a bit unclear at

the moment, she learned plenty in school that will carry over nicely in a professional setting. As president of the NPCSOH Student Association, Jocius volunteered to help drive the fundraising initiatives for the school’s National Collegiate Landscape Competition team. She organized anything from plant sales and garden cleanups to golf tournaments to help raise money for the team. On the NCLC team, she competed in the hardscape installation, irrigation troubleshooting and compact excavator operation events.

She can tout plant identification skills and leadership positions alike, but Jocius says the number one thing she learned in college was time management.

“One of the biggest takeaways that I’ve learned is time management, in both the practical component of the program – taking the time to organize myself and the crew that’s with me – and also in the in-class, academic setting,” she says. “I think time management will translate into a professional setting when I’m leading a crew. Good time management would be especially important if the crew has tight deadlines we need to meet, and important in everyday settings to make sure we get what the crew needs to (accomplish).” **L&L**







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