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State *of the* Industry Report

Cautious optimism

While uncertainty surrounds the industry due to COVID-19, the numbers from 2019 show the industry was healthy before the pandemic. **S3**

Stay the course

Before and after COVID-19 hit, contractors across the country were busy, but whether that continues is up for debate. **S8**

The next round

Amidst the pandemic, it's still uncertain what the economy will look like beyond the fall. Here's how contractors are preparing. **S16**

Leveraging lowball competition

Cost affordable landscaping can be a gateway into the industry, and a revenue boost for companies ready to repair work that didn't meet the customers' needs. **S20**



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Brian Horn

Editor, Lawn & Landscape

“So, as you prepare for next year, maybe an outside-the-box idea like Van Eaton’s is something worth considering.”

Taking chances

A common theme among landscapers I’ve talked with throughout the last six months has been a conservative approach to operating their businesses. They’ve told me that now is not the time to try something new or make a big purchase. Sure, landscapers did add COVID-19 cleaning services, although for some, that was a method of survival.

But our story on page 8 is about Billy Van Eaton, owner of Cumberland Landscape Group in Atlanta, who took a chance on something that isn’t too common in the business world. He added a chaplain, who comes in twice a week, to the company payroll.

“I think what really won me over was just understanding the day-to-day stress that everybody has in this environment,” says Pernell Roberts, vice president of operations at the company.

The move started with the owner and his leadership team discussing an employee assistance program. You can read the story for more details, but Van Eaton says he didn’t do this to force religion onto his workforce. He wanted to give his employees someone to talk to if they needed it.

And in 2020, I think we all could use someone to talk to. But as I’ve written here before, the industry as a whole seems to be doing OK. Our 2020 State of the Industry does back that up, though there is still some trepidation.

Of the concerns we list in our SOI survey, labor is once again at the top of the list, but a possible economic recession and the presidential election are now added into the mix, along with COVID-19. We added personal stress as an option a few years ago and it consistently ranks in the top 10 as a concern.

When the calendar turns to 2021, the ills of 2020 aren’t going to magically go away. So, as you begin to prepare for next year, maybe an outside-the-box idea like Van Eaton’s is something worth considering. Sometimes adopting that old saying, “zig when everyone else zags,” could make your company better off than it was before. — *Brian Horn*

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5811 Canal Rd., Valley View, OH, 44125

Phone: 800-456-0707 Editorial Fax: 216-651-0830 Subscriptions & Classifieds: 800-456-0707

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EDITORIAL

BRIAN HORN EDITOR bhorn@gie.net

JIMMY MILLER ASSISTANT EDITOR jmiller@gie.net

KIM LUX ASSISTANT EDITOR klux@gie.net

JIM HUSTON J.R. HUSTON ENTERPRISES jhuston@giemedia.com

BRUCE WILSON & COMPANY bwilson@giemedia.com

THE HARVEST GROUP harvest@giemedia.com

KRISTEN HAMPSHIRE CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

CREATIVE

JUSTIN ARMBURGER ART DIRECTOR jarmburger@gie.net

ADVERTISING/PRODUCTION INQUIRIES

CAITLIN MCCOY cmccoy@gie.net

SALES

DAVID SZY PUBLISHER dszy@gie.net

TRACI MUELLER ACCOUNT MANAGER tmuller@gie.net

BRIAN MAY ACCOUNT MANAGER bmay@gie.net

DANNY WALSH ACCOUNT MANAGER dwalsh@gie.net

RUSSELL WARNER NATIONAL ACCOUNT MANAGER rwarner@gie.net

STEVEN WEBB CLASSIFIED ADVERTISING SALES swebb@gie.net

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IRENE SWEENEY MARKETING DIRECTOR

MICHELLE WISNIEWSKI PRODUCTION MANAGER

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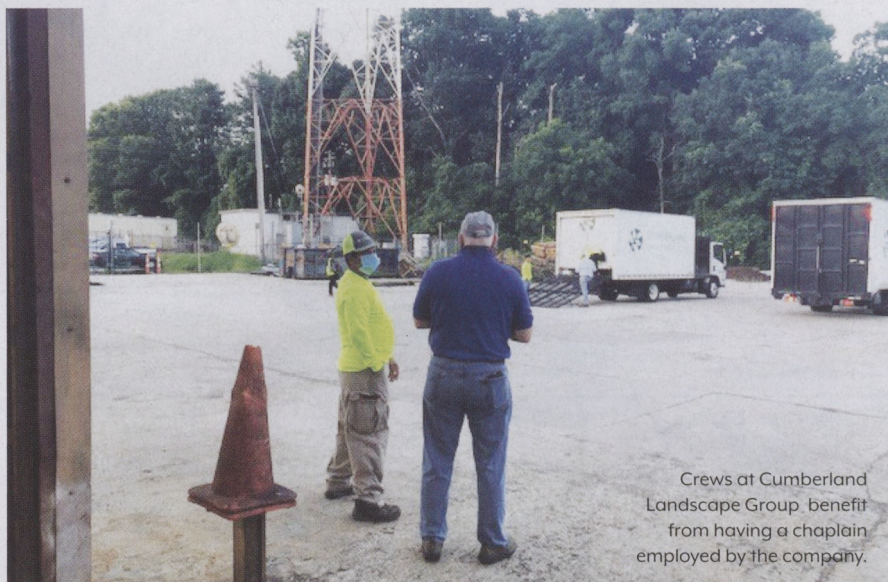
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Crews at Cumberland Landscape Group benefit from having a chaplain employed by the company.

A UNIQUE WAY TO CARE

A Georgia-based landscaping company hired a chaplain to support its staff through difficult circumstances and change.

By Nathan Mehring

For Cumberland Landscape Group, it has been a year of rejoicing, difficulty and change: Two employees had children and two employees lost their mothers. COVID-19 hit and a few of its employees got sick. As it affected the Atlanta-area, Cumberland experienced a delay in work.

Employees feared for their jobs, health and families, says CEO Billy Van Eaton.

Van Eaton and his leadership team then considered their employees' needs and how they could create an employee-assistance program. He wanted his employees to have an outlet and a resource in the company for their mental and spiritual needs.

PICKING A SERVICE. While gathering ideas, he says he listened to a podcast named "Faith-

Driven Entrepreneur" that discussed hiring a company chaplain, who supervises them and how to do it. This was a new idea to Van Eaton.

"I've known about chaplains for a long time. I haven't really heard about them in the business world. I've heard about them for sports teams, schools, stuff like that," he says.

From there, Van Eaton investigated a few organizations and decided to contact Corporate Chaplains of America. After speaking to a few representatives from the company and feeling the organization aligned with his faith and his company's core values, he met Chaplain Tim Mitchell.

Mitchell worked in the corporate world before going to seminary and becoming a chaplain. He studied Spanish and lived in Latin and South America for years, so he able to communicate well with Cumberland's

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**BY BEING FLUENT IN SPANISH, CHAPLAIN
TIM MITCHELL WAS ABLE TO CONNECT
WITH CUMBERLAND'S LARGELY LATINO WORKFORCE.**

largely Latino workforce. "I speak Spanish, not great anymore," Van Eaton says. "So, the fact that Tim can connect very easily with our guys, I think it's huge. Again, we want to try to remove barriers as much as possible and language is one of those barriers that exist."

Speaking Spanish was a requirement Van Eaton had for hiring on a chaplain. After multiple interviews, Van Eaton hired him.

The price is determined by the number of employees and since Cumberland only has about 50 employees, Mitchell costs \$600 per month to keep on staff.

MAKING A DIFFICULT CHOICE. Prior to hiring, Van Eaton says he discussed this decision with his leadership team, who was hesitant to hire a chaplain.

Despite sharing a similar faith, his team thought it was inappropriate for the corporate

workplace and crossed too many lines.

He stayed persistent, showing them how a chaplain could help as many of the changes in life occurred in his employees. After a couple of months, the team began to support the idea, Van Eaton says.

"I think what really won me over was just understanding the day-to-day stress that everybody has in this environment," says Pernell Roberts, VP of operations at Cumberland.

"It's stressful enough because you deal with the elements and everything else that's going on. And then, you throw in this COVID thing that just that hit and it just kind of shook the foundation for everybody... So, I felt like having that service available now stood out to me more than ever before."

This idea wasn't out-of-character for Van Eaton. He prayed before board meetings at a previous company, had led a Bible study at

Cumberland and openly discusses his faith in the office, but despite this he still wasn't completely confident with the idea.

"I definitely felt some nervousness. I just didn't know how it would go to be honest... my nervous side is less than it was when we started, but we're dealing with people which are unpredictable," he says.

He had considered going with a secular option by hiring his brother, a counselor, to help at the company. He says he didn't want to try out multiple ideas to see what works. Rather, he wanted to "pick a lane" and choose one service to invest heavily on.

"I never pulled the trigger on it," he says. "I liked the faith idea, I guess."

"I liked that he could be nimble enough that he could be just a counselor, or he could be kind of a pastor and get pastoral care. So, I liked the combo."

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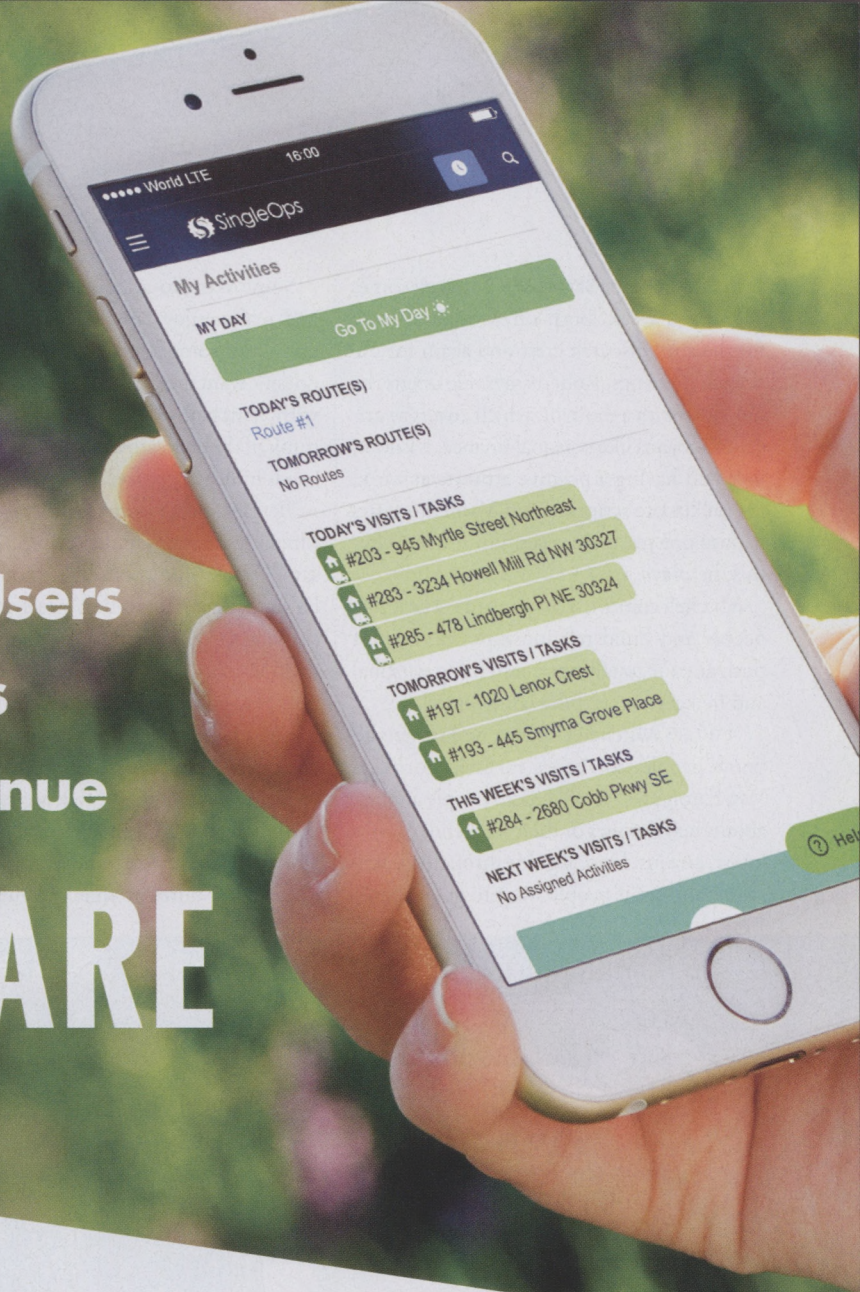
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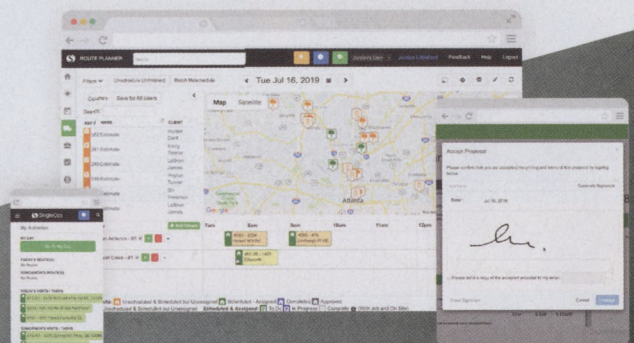
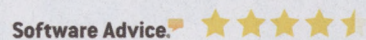
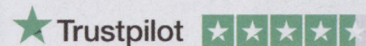


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**EMPLOYEES ARE UNDER NO
OBLIGATION TO SPEAK WITH
THE CHAPLAIN, WHO IS ALSO ON CALL 24-7.**

THE CHAPLAIN'S SERVICES. Mitchell comes in twice a week, both on Mondays: once for the a.m. dispatch crew and again for the branch meetings, Roberts says. He opens the meetings with a thought, which covers a variety of subjects like personal finance, wisdom, love and having a positive attitude at work. He will quote scripture, but Van Eaton says it does not resemble a sermon much. After this, he prays.

Mitchell comes to company to get to know people and build relationships. He doesn't push anyone to talk about anything personal and he keeps everything confidential.

"(When Mitchell's there,) he just gets to know people, so there's no strict format," Van Eaton says. "He'll talk to people and ask about their families or their weekend, or, you know, and just kind of guide through conversation and see if people want to go deeper."

Some want to go deeper in conversation and really enjoy Mitchell's presence, some don't and some are still unsure. Van Eaton doesn't want anyone to feel pressured to talk with Mitchell. He says he wants them to think of the chaplain as a resource if someone needs him, as a counselor or spiritual advisor.

"I think people need to be talking about (difficult situations in their lives)," Van Eaton says. "Those things need to be brought into light so that people don't feel like they're carrying them by themselves, and the hope is that (Mitchell) can be someone that can help walk along people and be a comfort for them."

Roberts says he understands the importance of this kind of service for his employees.

"I think about people that are dealing with mental illness and people are just walking around you every day and you just have no idea of the burdens that carrying and the

weight that they have on their shoulders," he says. "And I think having that service, having that available to them is, to me, it can be life altering for that for them, because they have someone that they can talk to and they can get help if they need further assistance."

Van Eaton says Mitchell can offer advice on many subjects: how to raise children, how to make a marriage work and how to create a budget for their families. He focuses a lot on finances because he came out of the financial world and is knowledgeable about it.

Mitchell is also on-call. If an employee calls him, he will call back within 15 minutes, no matter the time. If he doesn't, Corporate Chaplains of America puts a pinging noise on his phone until he calls back. If this doesn't work, a chaplain in a higher position or a regional manager get involved, Van Eaton says.



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THE NEW NORMAL. Mitchell has been there for several months now. Roberts says it was a bit odd for some of the employees in the beginning: it was new, they didn't know

who he is, they didn't know if he was going to push his beliefs on them.

They were suspicious and reluctant to speak with him. Now, Roberts says they

love him. He knows many of them by name and they respond to him when he comes in and talks.

"I think has been a great – the chemistry that he's been able to build in this short period of time," he says. "My guys are in and out. We're talking 15 minutes in the morning, so you don't have a whole lot of time to build relationships, but he's able to do that."

The only complaint Van Eaton has received about Mitchell is that the chaplain spoke for too long, about 20 minutes, before one of the team meetings.

He feels more comfortable with the service the longer Mitchell is there. He hasn't seen a big impact on the company yet but is standing by it to see where it goes.

"And I think that in some sense, like with the chaplain, it's kind of like we're on an adventure," he says. "We're going to see what happens."



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WOODLAND ENVIRONMENT IN OHIO JOINS LANDCARE

Woodland Environment was founded in 2016 by two industry veterans in Columbus.

In July, Woodland Environment owners Jeff Rupp and Craig Nye sold their company to LandCare, becoming partners in the business.

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**WOODLAND ENVIRONMENT OWNERS
JEFF RUPP AND CRAIG NYE WILL STAY
ON AFTER THE COMPANY WAS SOLD TO LANDCARE.**

in 2016 when landscape veterans Rupp and Nye created their commercial landscape management business to serve the real estate industry in Columbus. With over 30 years of combined landscaping experience, they saw an opportunity to offer personal service backed by a strong commitment to quality work and a great environment for employees to grow, according to a company press release.

When they first considered merging their business, they wanted to ensure they found a partner that would allow them to stay connected to the team they had built while providing the support and autonomy to continue to grow within the market, the press release said.

"LandCare gave us the opportunity to continue to run the business as partners, with

the confidence that our values and principles would never be compromised," Rupp said. "When considering the implications of joining a larger company, that was it for us. It was LandCare or continue on our own."

Independent of LandCare, Rupp and Nye were building a healthy company; however, they found there were aspects of the business that made it difficult to navigate.

"LandCare brought us access to resources that really took the day-to-day administrative work out of the equation," Nye added.

"Now, we're allowed to focus entirely on growing relationships with our customers and team members while expanding our business at a much higher rate. We are still owners and are still deeply committed to this business, but now we have the backing of a larger support team dedicated to helping us grow."

LandCare is a national company serving over 20 states across the country. Once publicly traded and subsequently owned by private equity investors, it is now privately held by its leaders.

"We have constancy of purpose," said Mike Bogan, CEO of LandCare. "We have a long-term perspective on building our company the right way. We focus on organic growth and see these acquisitions as a means of expansion only when we can bring likeminded team members that are aligned to our core values together. I've known, worked with and respected Jeff and Craig for many years. They fit perfectly into our team and it's exciting to work together with them again."

Woodland Environment has already rebranded as LandCare.

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ARGONNE CAPITAL INVESTS IN SCHILL GROUNDS MANAGEMENT

In partnership with Schill, the private investment firm is seeking additional acquisitions in the commercial landscaping industry.

ATLANTA — Argonne Capital Group has made a controlling investment in Schill Grounds Management, a privately held commercial landscaping company based in Cleveland.

Proceeds from the investment funded shareholder liquidity and the acquisition of McCoy Landscape Services, a complementary landscaping company in Marion, Ohio. The investment paves the way for Argonne and Schill to make additional investments in the commercial landscaping industry.

Schill was founded more than two decades ago by Jerry Schill, who will continue to serve as CEO and maintain a meaningful ownership stake.

Argonne was attracted to the commercial landscape market because of its recurring non-discretionary revenue model, fragmentation and natural resistance to economic cycles. In partnership with Schill, the private investment firm is actively seeking additional acquisitions in the commercial landscaping industry.

"Jerry Schill and his team have set the

standard for best-in-class service in Northeast Ohio for more than 25 years and shown remarkable resilience during the COVID-19 outbreak," said Bill Weimar, managing director at Argonne. "Argonne is excited to be partnering with the Schill team to support the company's efforts to accelerate growth organically and through acquisitions."

Since founding the company in 1993, Jerry Schill has led Schill Grounds Management through periods of expansion. The company added multiple locations in Northeast Ohio to serve the year-round landscaping and snow and ice removal needs of over 700 multi-family, commercial, office, health care and industrial properties.



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"Argonne will be a great partner to help us execute the next chapter of growth," Schill said. "The firm brings a significant amount of expertise to our organization and has a history of working with closely-held businesses like Schill to achieve great results. I am excited to leverage the combined experience of Schill, McCoy and Argonne to provide a customer experience that is unmatched in the industry."

Advisors on the transaction were Jeff Harkness of Three Point Group and King & Spalding LLP. Plexus Capital provided senior debt financing for the investment.

SAVATREE ACQUIRES JORDAN'S TREE MOVING & MAINTENANCE

SavATree will incorporate Jordan's into its existing Fort Collins, Colorado, branch.

BEDFORD HILLS, N.Y. – SavATree, which offers tree, shrub and lawn care, has acquired Jordan's Tree Moving & Maintenance of Fort Collins, Colorado.

Jordan's Tree Moving & Maintenance is one of the largest local tree care and tree transplanting companies in the Front Range. They have been servicing customers in Northern Colorado and Wyoming since 1984. SavATree will incorporate Jordan's into its existing Fort Collins, Colorado branch.

Jordan's service offerings range from tree pruning and trimming to tree transplanting and removals. In addition to current offerings, clients will now have access to a wider range of services including professional lawn care, plant health care, organic options and consulting services.

"We are thrilled to join forces with Jordan's Tree Moving & Maintenance. Our shared commitment to exceptional service and customer satisfaction will ensure a smooth transition for all clients and allow us to expand our reach in the west," said SavATree's Executive Chairman Daniel van Starrenburg. "This acquisition builds on the successful acquisition of Mountain High Tree, Lawn & Landscape and Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care."

"We have always been very committed to providing the highest quality service to our customers," said Jordan's Tree Moving & Maintenance owner David Jordan. "Finding a company with that same philosophy makes this a terrific match."

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Entries are evaluated on effectiveness of herbaceous perennial plant material used through the implementation of new cultivars, color combinations, textures and seasonal combinations.

PERENNIAL PLANT ASSOCIATION HONORS THREE LANDSCAPE DESIGNERS

The entries comprise 11 categories based on residential, commercial, educational and temporary/seasonal designs.

During the Perennial Plant Association's 2020 virtual Annual Meeting, three landscape design companies were recognized for their exemplary projects. The entries comprise 11 categories based on residential, commercial, educational, temporary/seasonal designs and price of production.

Initiated in 1992, the Landscape Design Awards program recognizes design projects that are exemplary in use of herbaceous perennials to help create balanced and beautiful landscapes. The "after market" applications of the growers' products and the design, installation and maintenance of plants in gardens and natural settings are also of special interest to the Perennial Plant Association.

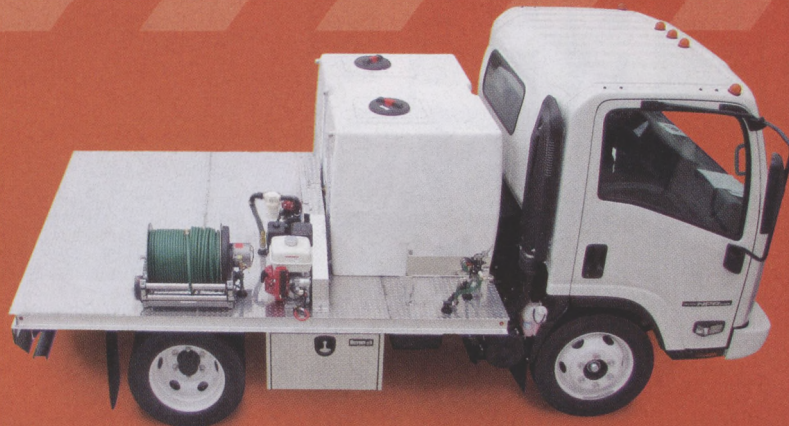
Each year, judges evaluate the landscape designs and select the best entries based on the effectiveness of herbaceous perennial plant material

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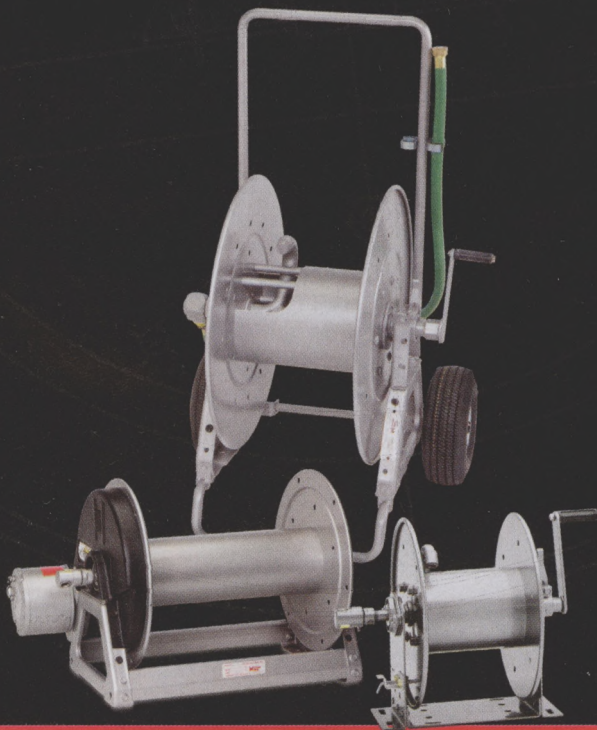
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This year's recipients included **Campion Hruby Landscape Architects**, **Tony Spencer** and **Richard Hartlage** and **Garrett Devier**.

used through the implementation of new cultivars, color combinations, textures and seasonal combinations.

THIS YEAR'S RECIPIENTS INCLUDE:

• **Campion Hruby Landscape Architects** received two Honor Awards for their Children's Garden at Hospice of the Chesapeake project and Skywater project. They also received a Merit Award for their Tudor House project. Per the PPA press release:

The judges felt the Children's Garden at Hospice of the Chesapeake was a truly impactful project. Done with a shoestring budget and generous donations from the local landscape industry, the Children's Garden is designed to "create a sanctuary of healing, reflection and sharing for families that were suffering unthinkable pain."

The team "loved the idea of a highly modern structure set into a wild, unruly landscape" for the Skywater project and the landscape architects were able to "influence how position and rotation to take advantage of waterfront views, avoid damaging existing trees and minimize grading."

The Tudor House project featured an urban property where the landscape architects included "large swaths of native shrubs and colorful perennials (that) drift through the garden, pulling together new and old spaces."

• **Tony Spencer: The New Perennialist** received an Honor Award for The New Perennial Pond Garden project. This project was designed in 2016 and "is a local Canadian expression of the New Perennial movement in naturalistic planting design, whose ethos is about making gardens in symbiosis with nature."

• **Richard Hartlage & Garrett Devier with Land Morphology** received an Honor Award for their Creekside Contemporary Residence project. This project transformed a former horse pasture into a 5.6-acre garden that "offers a series of garden rooms programmed for family-oriented activities."

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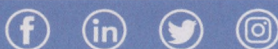
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Employees of Saunders Brothers were on site for the unveiling of the White House's newly renovated Rose Garden in August.

SAUNDERS BROTHERS HELPS RENOVATE WHITE HOUSE ROSE GARDEN

In June, the Saunders were invited to the White House to consult with a few landscape architecture firms.

PINEY RIVER, Va. – Saunders Brothers and NewGen Boxwood, introduced by Saunders Genetics, were involved in the renovation of the White House Rose Garden, unveiled to the public by First Lady Melania Trump in August.

In June, the Saunders were invited to the White House to consult with landscape architecture firms Perry Guillot and Oehme, van Sweden and Associates on options for boxwood cultivars. This collaboration was the first step in a process that culminated in the selection and installation of over 400 Saunders Brothers boxwood, including 350 NewGen Independence from the NewGen Boxwood collection.

Saunders Brothers advised the project committee in the selection of better Boxwood Blight resistant NewGen Independence for the formal parterre hedges. Identifying Boxwood Blight resistant cultivars for the update was specifically a part of the master planning. **L&L**

PHOTO COURTESY OF SAUNDERS BROTHERS

A stylized illustration of a house with large windows and a gabled roof, surrounded by tall, colorful flowers in shades of orange, red, and purple. A person is visible working in the garden in front of the house. The background is a warm, orange-hued sky with a large, stylized sun or moon at the top center.

State *of the* Industry Report

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Unwavering commitment

This year has come with a set of unprecedented global challenges affecting every facet of our lives, personal and professional. As a manufacturer it is our duty to closely follow the changing needs of our dealers and most importantly, our customers. In the turf industry, we might not be able to celebrate the strides and successes of 2019, but the good news is the turf segment has shown amazing resiliency to the changing business landscape.

At Kubota, we understand that while work conditions and restrictions vary from state-to-state, an eye on efficient equipment and flexible financing is more critical than ever to allow landscapers to compete, remain profitable, and grow. We are grateful that in most regions landscaping is deemed an essential business, and while we may have to pivot on some fronts, others are moving forward as usual.

We have a long history of engineering equipment that greatly reduces time for commercial contractors, and Kubota continues to refine our equipment offerings with performance and efficiency in mind. Last year, Kubota entered the stand-on mower category with three new machines and this year we added one more model to that series.

Employee retention and performance remains a major consideration for contractors; reducing operator fatigue, while improving productivity will continue to lead product development in commercial mowing equipment. Kubota recently upgraded several comfort features across our mower lines, such as adding a standard suspension high-back seat on our Z400 zero turn mower.

In addition to producing high-quality equipment, Kubota is proud to serve as an overall business partner with our dealers and customers. This year, equipment financing has proven more important than ever for the turf segment. We are proud to offer extremely competitive financing offers. In addition, Kubota is working to add more flexibility to our fleet program, to offer solutions to contractors that will better suit a wide range of changing needs.

Even in the midst of a pandemic, Kubota looks at 2020 with an unwavering commitment to the turf segment. From new products to new finance offers, we will continue to innovate in a changing work and business environment to support commercial contractors.

Let's remain united at a time when harmony, determination and teamwork will carry us through. We are here for you. ●

Best regards,

Todd Stucke

Kubota Tractor Corporation
Senior Vice President, Marketing,
Product Support & Strategic Projects



**This year,
equipment
financing has
proven more
important than
ever for the turf
segment.**

cautious OPTIMISM

WHILE UNCERTAINTY surrounds the industry due to COVID-19, the numbers from 2019 show the industry was healthy before the pandemic. After three consecutive years of median revenue decreasing, it grew to \$297,000 compared to \$273,000 in 2018. This is a good sign for the industry, although mean revenue decreased to \$1.3 million from \$1.5 in 2018, meaning the smaller and larger companies – the outliers – saw a slight decrease.

Contractors' outlook for their companies is still positive, but those numbers did see a

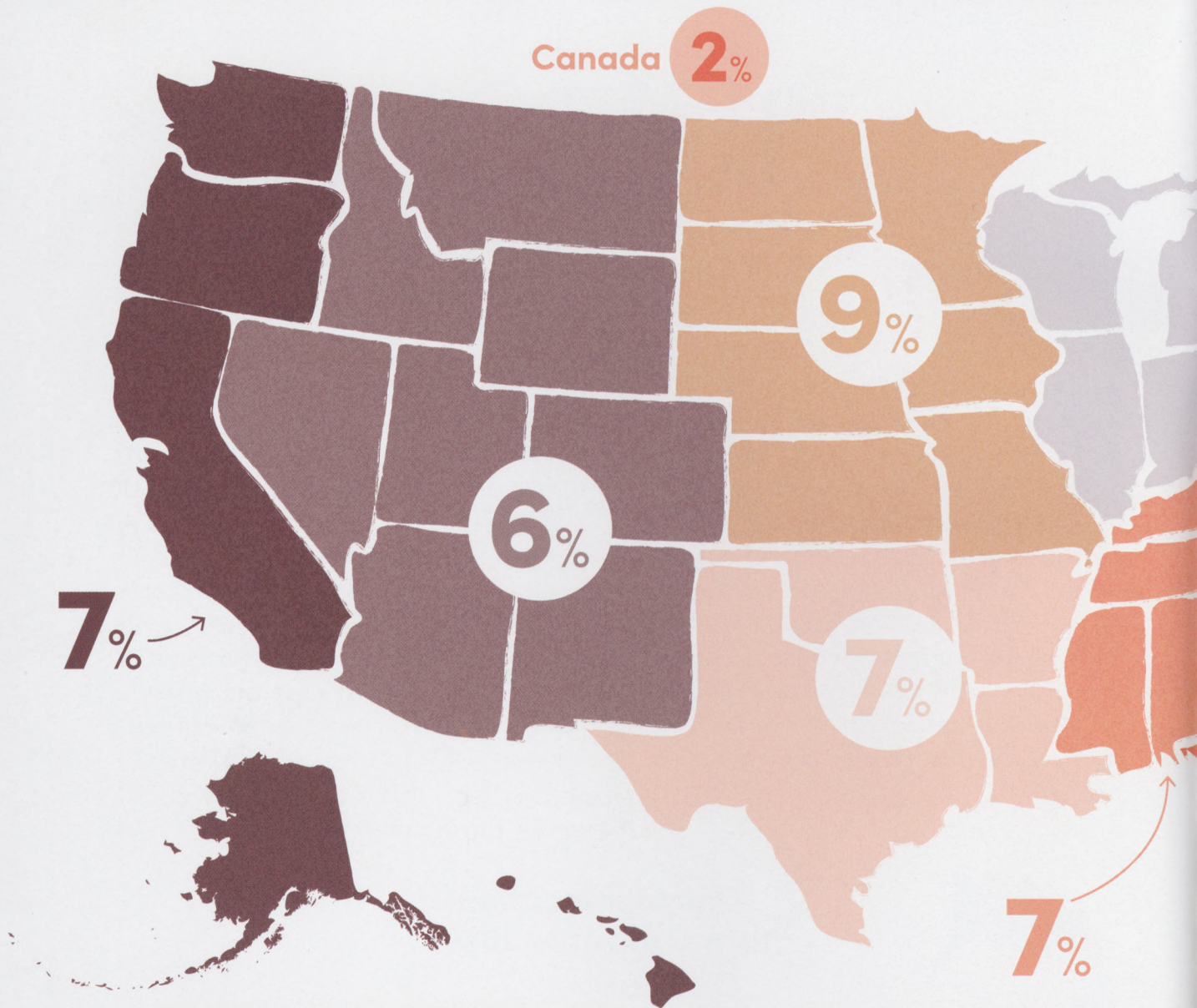
slight decrease. About 94% of landscapers were confident their companies would grow in last year's survey, and this year it dropped to 88%. Last year 6% were "not confident at all" that their company would grow, and this year that number jumped to 11%.

Labor once again remains the top concern, but decreased from 6.9 out of 1-10 (10 means very concerned) scale in 2018 to 6.5 in 2019. COVID-19 was listed as a concern option this year and it tied for 7th out of 27 in our rankings with a 5.5 score. – *Brian Horn*

↓
Did your location
turn a profit in 2019?

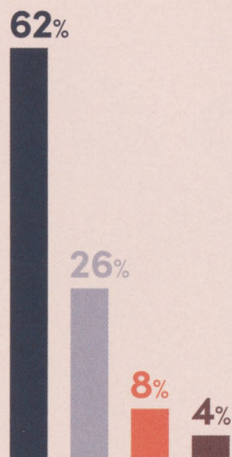
Yes

87%



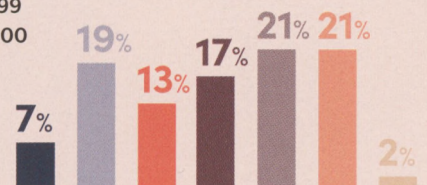
Approximately what percentage of your location's 2019 gross revenue came from each of the following property types?

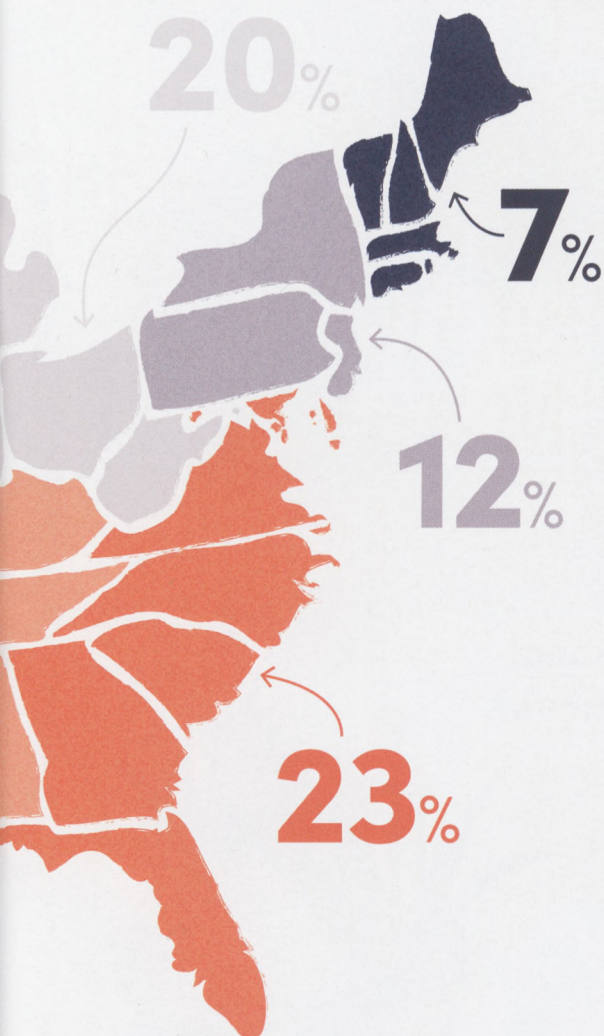
- Single-family residential
- Commercial/industrial
- Multi-family structures
- Government/institutional



Approximately what was your location's gross revenue in 2019 (in USD)?

- More than \$4 million
- \$1 million-\$3.99 million
- \$500,000-\$999,999
- \$200,000-\$499,999
- \$50,000-\$199,999
- Less than \$50,000
- No Answer





In which state/province is your company location?

NORTHEAST

- **New England:** CT, MA, ME, NH, RI, VT
- **Middle Atlantic:** NJ, NY, PA

MIDWEST

- **East North Central:** IL, IN, MI, OH, WI
- **West North Central:** IA, KS, MN, MO, NE, ND, SD

SOUTH

- **South Atlantic:** DC, DE, FL, GA, MD, NC, PR/VI, SC, VA, WV
- **East South Central:** AL, KY, MS, TN
- **West South Central:** AR, LA, OK, TX

WEST

- **Mountain:** AZ, CO, ID, MT, NM, NV, UT, WY
- **Pacific:** AK, CA, HI, OR, WA



Which of the following services does your location currently offer?

88% Lawn Care/
Chemical
Application

40% Snow and Ice
Management

15% Perimeter
Pest Control

9% Sports Turf

87% Landscape
Maintenance

16% Vegetation
Management

14% Mosquito
Control

7% Garden Center

71% Landscape Design
/Construction

15% Holiday
Lighting

9% Nursery
/Grower

4% Interiorscaping

63% Trees

47% Irrigation



↓
“I owned a larger business 10 years ago, and it just became a nightmare trying to keep people motivated, keep them on board. In my area, it’s a very transient workforce. It’s just me and I love it that way.”

FRANCIS CONNERNEY, OWNER
TAMPA OUTDOOR SOLUTIONS

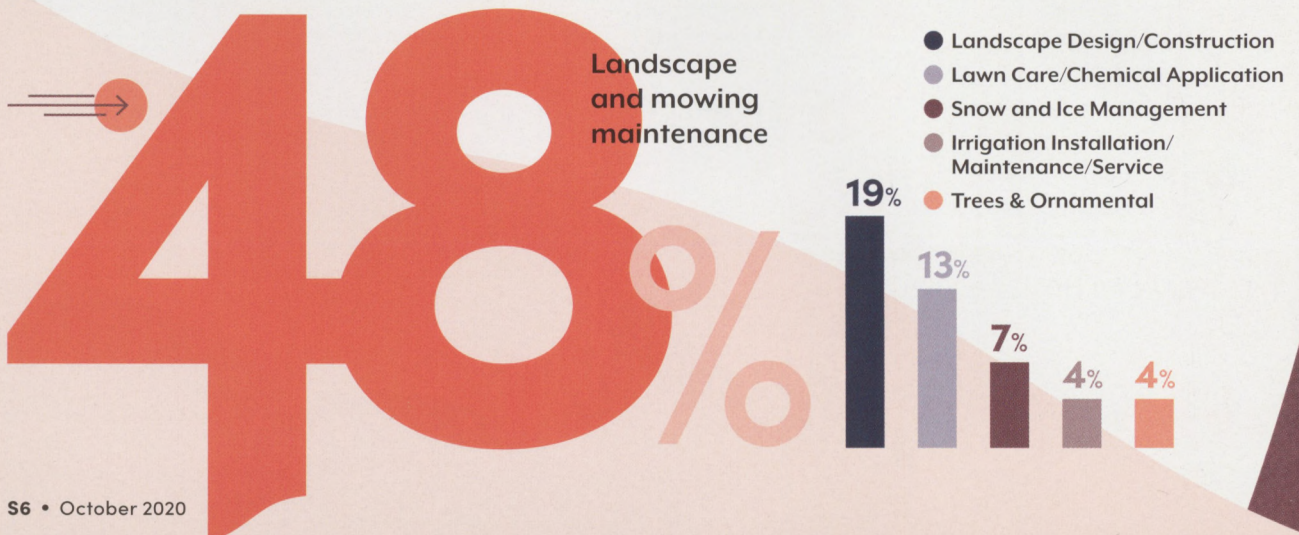
Read more on S14

How many full-time, part-time, and seasonal employees does your location currently have?

MEDIAN: 7 • MEAN: 19



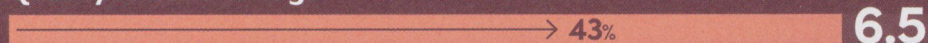
Approximately what percentage of your location’s 2019 gross revenue came from each of the following services?



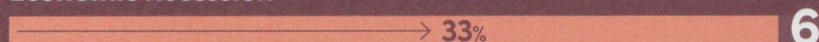
How would you rate your concern with each of the following issues and their impact on your location's business in the next three years?

(10=very concerned; 1=not at all concerned)

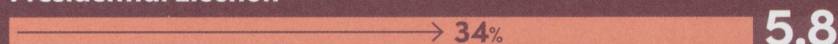
Quality Labor Shortage



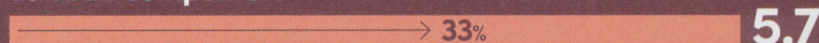
Economic Recession



Presidential Election



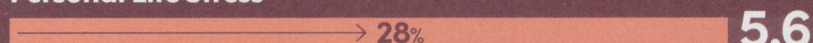
Lowball Competitors



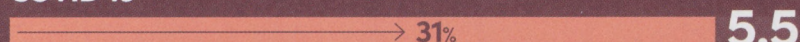
High Workers' Compensation Costs



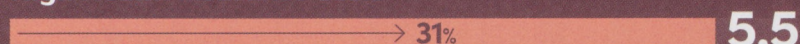
Personal Life Stress



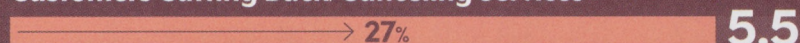
COVID-19



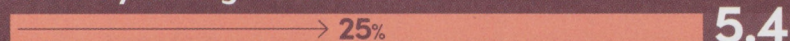
High Health Insurance Costs



Customers Cutting Back/Canceling Services



Difficulty Raising Prices for Work



The Bottom Five

Business Lending/Credit Crunch



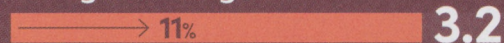
Housing Foreclosures



High Fertilizer Prices



Immigration Regulations



H-2B Program Changes/Challenges



The percentages at left show how many respondents ranked an issue as a major concern in the next three years by scoring it an 8, 9 or 10.

Survey Methodology

The survey sample of 17,850 represented emailable Lawn & Landscape recipients at unique company locations (one record per company location) in the U.S. and Canada classified with titles of owner, president, partner, executive, or general manager. The survey was fielded by Readex Research from June 25- July 13, 2020. The margin of error for percentages based on 550 landscape contractors/lawn care operators is ± 4.1 percentage points at the 95% confidence level.

MEDIAN: The number in the middle where extreme outliers are removed like respondents with extremely high or low revenue.

MEAN: The average of all respondents.

Some charts don't total to 100 percent due to rounding and omission of some answer options here.

↓

Before and after COVID-19 hit, contractors across the country were busy, but whether that continues is up for debate.



the course

Illustration by **Christina Chung**

Gary Morische, owner

Gary's Lawn & Snow Service, Osage, Iowa

Morische says despite all the uncertainty that plagued 2020, he's been able to keep things consistent.

"It's been real steady, and so far, so good," he says.

Morische says 2019 was a good year overall, but a mild winter served as a bump in the road. He's hoping for a better one this year.

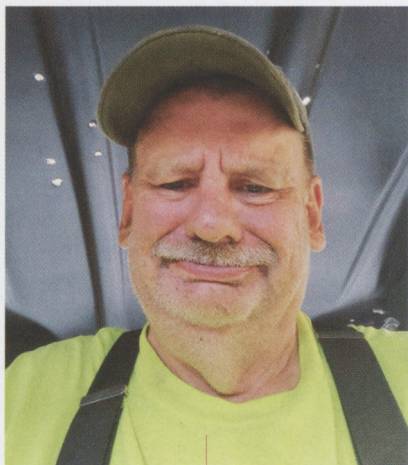
"I had a slow winter, but summer was really good," he says.

"Like everybody else in this business, it all depends on the weather. We'll finish up this year pretty good, but it depends on how the winter goes. We always look forward to a new year. We're hoping COVID will slow down and exit the picture."

While Morische was able to continue working throughout the coronavirus crisis, it did have an effect on his customers.

"It's affected some things... as far as people paying their bills it's been slow, but they're still coming through," he says. "I understand it. It's been hard for people."

Morische says he's always been understanding when it comes to a customer's ability to pay.



**“The best thing
for my business is
word of mouth.”**

“When I started this business, I started it to help people out. I didn’t do it to get rich. That wasn’t the goal for me,” he says.

Additionally, Morische says that the current economic climate has kept him from expanding his business or offering new services.

“We always look for advancements or different opportunities,” he says. “But this year we haven’t made many changes. Because of COVID, we’ve kept things pretty straight and narrow. It’s not really a good time to try something that’ll take more outgoing than incoming.

Morsche’s been able to grow his business each year and hopes that’ll continue.

“We just take on work when I can,” he says. “It’s been a good, steady growth.”

Along with adding more commercial properties recently, Morische says having a good reputation is critical.

“The best thing for my business is word of mouth,” he says. “When you do good work, you get people to recommend you to somebody else. That’s a big value as far as I’m concerned.” — *Kim Lux*



Bill Bumgardner, principle
Bumgardner Landscape, Medford, Oregon

Bumgardner credits the company’s reputation for their growth and success in 2019 and early 2020, but a strategic shift in bidding for new work has also played a role.

“We’ve attempted to bid on more projects and have been a little more aggressive on projects,” he says. “We also added some qualified staff members to the irrigation side. That’s really made our jump. We’re over 120% more in revenue than last year in irrigation repair.”

Bumgardner Landscape finished 2019 up 14.5% from 2018 and was already up about 37% early on this year before the pandemic hit.

“We’re still cautiously optimistic,” he says. “I wish I had a crystal ball and could say either way. I don’t think anybody knows. We’ll stay positive and do the best we can. We’ve got quite a few projects on our books for the rest of the year, so I think we’ll be steady. I don’t think we’ll see too many significant dips.”

Like a lot of landscapers, Bumgardner says his clients that were hit hardest by COVID-19 were commercial shopping centers and retail establishments. However, revenue was up for several

other services, so Bumgardner notes it all evened out.

“We made it up in different revenue streams,” he says. “Maintenance might have been down, but irrigation repair and landscape construction were up.”

Bumgardner says that despite the tough couple of months, he’s already getting some contract renewals from his commercial clients for next year.

“They did ask us not to raise rates, so we’re accommodating that and holding the line,” he says. “This current climate calls for that to maintain our customer base.”

Bumgardner’s also been busy keeping up with a trend that seems to be increasing in popularity across Oregon.

“We’re in the Pacific Northwest so we get a lot of people who are fairly progressive in wanting less emissions,” he says. “Electric equipment seems to be getting people’s attention. We jumped into it full speed ahead this year. We have a larger HOA we take care of, and they’re very progressive... so we bought all electric equipment for their site.”

Bumgardner says he doesn’t feel that trend will slow down anytime soon.

— *Kim Lux*

Andrew Sebastian, president Sebastian Design Build, Silver Spring, Maryland

2020 has been a banner year for Sebastian Design Build.

"We started off to a really good start," he says. "COVID seemed to have a big impact, but surprisingly, it was a beneficial impact. We're having our best year ever in 21 years now. It's been a great year so far, and fall's looking good, too."

Sebastian says taking the time to focus on marketing for once has helped him have such a successful year.

"This is the first time I've ever had a structured marketing plan in the 20 years I've been doing business," he says. "That, combined with COVID-19 and people being quarantined in their houses, have made it a good year for us so far."

Having a better online presence has certainly helped Sebastian's business.

"We've been targeting things online and really focusing on SEO," he says. "I hired a company to pump up my SEO and have some online campaigns going."

Sebastian says it's a little embarrassing that it took him 21 years to figure it out, but he says he's finally got it.

"This year I've been trying to get the

systems going to increase efficiencies and increase our net profits," he says. "We've really been working on systems in the field, and in pricing and in marketing."

And all that hard work has paid off. Sebastian says his best year ever is still going.

"The fall is looking fantastic," he says. "I'm hoping that'll carry into early 2021. We're anticipating a strong start to 2021. We're up about 40-45% from last year. Our gross (income) is up and our net (income) is also up."

Sebastian says another key to the company's success is identifying jobs with the most net profit.

"We haven't had any major, super high-dollar projects, but we've been consistently in \$20,000-\$40,000 projects," he says. "I've been figuring out that that's where we do the best."

But there's still more work to be done, according to Sebastian.

"Building packages is on my list of things to work on," he says.

Sebastian says he's also been working to fill middle-management positions.

— Kim Lux



"I hired a
company to
pump up my
SEO and have
some online
campaigns going."

Deborah Wade, co-owner Wade's Lawn Service, Goodlettsville, Tennessee

Wade believes the old adage is true: Everyone wants a paycheck, but few want to work.

"Labor is something that we struggle with," she says. "It didn't necessarily start with the pandemic. It's really interesting that these jobs are available, but it's sometimes hard to find dependable people."

Hovering around eight employees this summer, Wade clarifies that her current batch of employees are dependable and work well together. But in her two decades of business, she says she's learned that the turnover rate is incredibly high.

At one point in time, she and her

husband could have the client schedules mapped out in their heads, and though they wrote it out, they wouldn't need to do so. But as they've grown, they've needed more labor — labor that just hasn't come in a steady stream.

"We've always had enough people to get done what we need to get done," she says, adding that it's just more difficult than it needs to be with labor being in such short supply.

Even now, the work is there: Wade says the pandemic hasn't been a blessing, but they've been blessed amidst it as they've

received more jobs than before. She believes people have simply had more enhancement work than she anticipated because they're sitting around, waiting for someone to come help them beautify their yards.

"We have been extremely busy since the pandemic. I don't know if it's the fact that people are sitting at home and they're looking out the window and thinking, 'You know, I need to get mulch,'" she says. "I think for the most part, the industry is doing good. Landscapers are still out working, so I think it's a good industry to be in. I'm happy to be a part of it." — Jimmy Miller

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**Francis
Connerney,**
owner
**Tampa Outdoor
Solutions, Tampa
Bay, Florida**

Connerney has been a one-man show since 2012, and he couldn't be happier.

He acknowledges the well-documented labor shortage in the industry, and at times, he had the same issues. But now he feels like he can make more money than before as he relies on himself, and he estimates he's only in his truck for 25 minutes throughout the day.

"I owned a larger business 10 years ago, and it just became a nightmare trying to keep people motivated, keep them on board," he says. "In my area, it's a very transient workforce. It's just me and I love it that way."

With that in mind, he's still got plenty of concerns, largely the economic fallout of a global pandemic. To this point, he's only lost two clients directly due to COVID-19, but he knows more are going to drop over time.

"It's not an 'if,' it's a 'when,'" Connerney says. "People are just not going to have that free income to do enhancements on their properties."

To prepare, he's invested heavily in new equipment and he paid for it all in cash, so when money gets tight later, he's already got reliable equipment to get him through. He's still doing the same maintenance work he's done before, plus he's seen an uptick in outdoor construction projects, general beautification, and with a bunch of recent rainfall, even some drainage installation.

For the time being, business is actually booming – he just doesn't know if it'll stay that way.

"Oddly enough for me, the pandemic has brought about people spending more money at their house," he says.

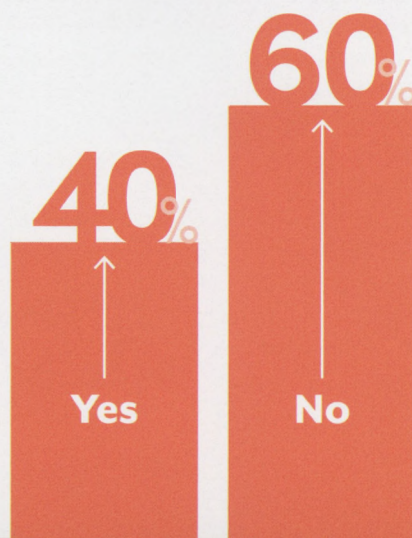
—Jimmy Miller

What was your location's employee retention rate for the past 12 months?



↓

"Labor is something that we struggle with. It didn't necessarily start with the pandemic. It's really interesting that these jobs are available, but it's sometimes hard to find dependable people."



**Did your business
receive a Payroll
Protection Program
Loan due to the
COVID-19 pandemic?**



↓
“People were only relating us to just cutting grass. **I felt we needed a name that encompassed everything we did** and didn’t just lock us down to seem like we were serving just one portion of the green industry.”

Drew Keenum, owner **Heritage Outdoors, Rainbow City, Alabama**

Keenum was plenty busy in 2019, rebranding his business from Rainbow Lawn Care & Landscaping to Heritage Outdoors, but despite the rebranding, he says the company has continued to grow.

“We actually did a full rebrand last year,” Keenum says. “We changed the name, logo – everything.” He notes that the rebrand also included opening a landscape supply company.

Keenum says the new name highlights all the services they offer, which include full lawn maintenance, irrigation and design/build.

“People were only relating us to just cutting grass,” he says. “I felt we needed a name that encompassed everything we did and didn’t just lock us down to seem like we were serving just one portion of the green industry.”

The local community even got to weigh in during the process by helping to pick the new name.

“We did a survey and Heritage Outdoors won,” he says. “I also did a competition with one of the local schools for the design of the logos.”

He adds that getting his customers on board with the changes was a struggle at times.

“We didn’t lose anybody, but I had to do a lot of legwork in educating the customers and explaining what we’re doing, how we’re doing it and what it’ll look like,” he says.

Through it all, Keenum says that 2019 and 2020 have been great for business.

“We’ve had our best two years,” he says. “Year over year, we’ve done well. We just past last year a few weeks ago in terms of revenue.”

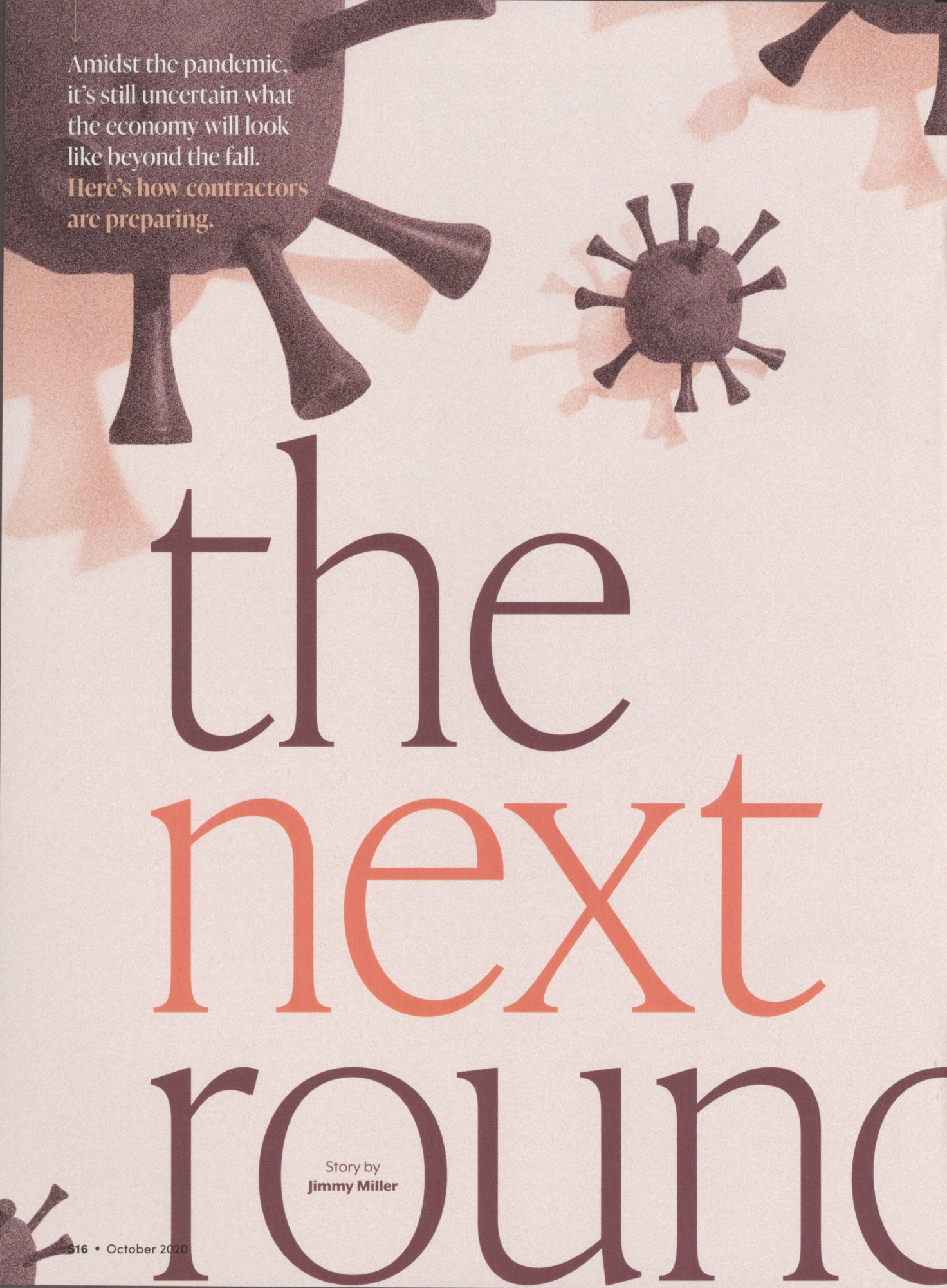
And Keenum is setting his sights even higher for 2021.

“The goal for 2021 is to expand further south and increase our accounts by 100%,” he says.

Keenum says he plans to target communities just north of Birmingham, where he notes a lot of people are moving in in order to escape city life. His business is about an hour north of Birmingham.

COVID-19 has kept Keenum from making any moves just yet, but he’s cautiously optimistic about the future.

“We’re still looking for expansion into different areas, but we aren’t making any big purchases right now,” he says. “We’re trying to be as conservative with our cash flow as possible.” – *Kim Lux*



Amidst the pandemic,
it's still uncertain what
the economy will look
like beyond the fall.

**Here's how contractors
are preparing.**

the next round

Story by
Jimmy Miller

Heath Hurst knows better than anybody that some good can come from an economic downturn.

In 2009, he started to take his part-time work in the green industry full time, in large part because he had few other choices. As he puts it, he was “just trying to make enough money to eat.” Jobs were far and few between, and he had been mowing lawns since he was a kid.

But it was scary then, and the start of the pandemic in March was scary, too. Hurst, now the owner of Heath Outdoor in Indianapolis, says his company spent the first several weeks of COVID-19 fixing up their own property and making small improvements. As restrictions loosened and it became clear they could work out in the field, Hurst says business quickly turned around.

Predicting where the fallout from this virus goes next is too difficult, Hurst says, and his company will continue to roll with the punches like before.

“We’re just going to keep going forward. It is way too global for me to try and anticipate what to do,” Hurst says.

LITTLE CERTAINTY. To be clear, Hurst says there will “absolutely” be a recession, but predicting how that’ll hurt the green industry is anybody’s guess. Meanwhile, out west in Phoenix, Ryan Jantz and his company, Sonora Sprinkler, have operated among one of the country’s largest hotspots for the virus. With such an older, extensive retiree population, COVID-19 has affected them greatly.

But Jantz was surprised that the demand for his services are so high at the moment. He’s had to raise his prices because the pandemic accelerated his business in unexpected ways. For the first time in company history, they might crack \$1 million in revenue.

“The calls came in so fast that my receptionist couldn’t keep up,” Jantz says. “In this area, everybody had to stay home and focus on their yards. I personally

believe there must be more money in people’s pockets than we realized.”

Jantz never had to shut everything down like Ryan Stehouwer in Michigan though. Stehouwer says his company, Sustainable Landscapes, only has two part-time employees and himself, which only complicated things when Michigan shut down for the first two months of the pandemic. Now, he says they’ve fallen so far behind on work that there’s some things they just won’t get around to, not with the cold Michigan weather just around the bend.

“It was terrible. Worst spring we’ve ever had,” he says. “We were at capacity and then we literally got shut down for two months. We have lost revenue just for the fact that there were spring clean-ups that we did not do.”

Of course, Stehouwer says his clients were entirely understanding and supportive. But as the economy worsens, his customers may need to cancel services simply because they’ll be out looking for jobs.

“Our worry is not a shutdown, but what we’re starting to see is so many people not

How confident are you that your (location’s business/national landscape industry) will grow in revenue in 2020?



working yet,” Stehouwer says. “We haven’t directly lost any accounts yet, but we know that we have a handful where if things don’t go different soon, we’re going to lose a handful of clients because they won’t be able to afford our services.”

WEATHERING THE STORM. Stehouwer says his company has already started to closely monitor their purchases and is making do with the equipment they already have. He says it’s not all “doom and gloom,” but they’re buckling down in case things worsen from here.

“I know in talking with some other guys, things could get interesting here in the next couple months,” he says, adding that companies that focus on commercial accounts in particular are suffering big time in Michigan. Stehouwer’s company focuses 90% of their attention on residential accounts, but as buildings continue to vacate in favor of remote work opportunities, he’s noticed they’re spending less and less with landscaping companies in the state.

The good news is that Stehouwer believes in his company’s ability to rebound, and he says that optimism can be shared industry wide.

“A lot of these companies aren’t going to let things get them down,” he says. “They’re going to find solutions to problems. It seems our industry’s extremely creative.”

Jantz says though his company has excelled in the pandemic, he’s worried about the labor shortage only getting worse. He’s spent hundreds on websites to help him find qualified applicants and has struggled to get people to show up to his yard, even when they’re hired and they say they’ll be there for the first day of work. He’s noticed some client cancellations not because they’re out of money, but because they simply went elsewhere to get their irrigation systems repaired or because Sonora Sprinkler couldn’t get out there in time.

He speculates that with unemployment checks coming in and a natural unwillingness to wanting to work outside in the hot Phoenix environment, he could be in this for the long haul.

“I’m not really worried about the economy. My only challenge is trying to secure quality labor,” Jantz says. “Of all the complaints I’ve had, almost zero had anything to do with price. There’s not enough warm bodies to fill demand.”

Jantz never had to stop work, but he says he’s asked himself what he’d do if the pandemic affects them like it did the restaurant industry. He says his



company would offer remote support and cut pricing in half, only to help clients figure out what product to buy to fix their own systems. He could even have them send in pictures so he could tell them accurately what to do.

Back in Indiana, Hurst says the secret to navigating the uncertainty of an economic recession is to simply adapt to the clients no matter what.

“I know there’s a lot of speculation, and I think that’s good because it prepares people for all sorts of possibilities, but the most important thing is that people try to be fluid,” he says. “Everything will work out fine.” ●



Change is coming

Expert David Crow anticipates the green industry will experience another “political whiplash.” **By Jimmy Miller**

The election could have a great impact on what the economy will look like in 2020, but there’s even more at play than the money.

If Joe Biden defeats Donald Trump in November’s presidential election, political expert David Crow says the green industry – and the country – will experience political whiplash for the second time in as many elections.

Crow spoke to attendees during the Turf and Ornamental Communicators Association Annual Meeting, which moved to an online format due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Crow, who founded D.C. Legislative and Regulatory Services in 1991, believes the landscaping industry could be in for another whirlwind.

“This year, if you go back into the voting booth and you surmise Biden will win, you can expect another 180,” he says. “We will have two political whiplashes four years apart.”

Since the election of Barack Obama in 2008, Crow says candidates have become less and less moderate with each passing election. Obama, he says, focused more on social change than candidates prior, which made elections more divisive.

Trump, he adds, has only added to that divisiveness, creating a political environment in which voters are selecting candidates they’re not even sure they like.

“When Biden is out on the stump, he tends to not do well,” Crow says. “All he really has is, ‘I’m not Donald Trump.’ So far, that’s been a huge feather in his cap. The fact is, Biden – while a likable guy – got here for one reason: He was Barack Obama’s vice president.”


Crow says that Trump has spent the last four years reversing what Obama accomplished during his term, many of which includes environmental regulations that directly affect how landscapers do business. He adds that voting for Biden is essentially going back to what Obama established, which he clarified that he did not think was necessarily a bad thing for the industry. Those in the green industry already sequester carbon and recycle and take care of water properly – it’s just a matter of changing with the times.

“If climate change drives all energy, all environment, and all tax... we’re going to have to do what we’re great at: show that we’re a game changer in the climate debate,” Crow says.

Crow believes Biden will be essentially forced to follow through with his campaign promises because there’s so much momentum on the left, which means that companies face stricter environmental regulations and significant tax increases. Though Biden currently says anyone making over \$400,000 is affected by the tax increase proposals, Crow says he anticipates that number to fall much lower.

And, according to Crow, landscapers better get used to this reality: Barring any major slips, he believes Biden will win the election.

“Unless Biden stumbles and stumbles big time, there’s almost no way he loses simply because Trump has run out of things he can say or he can do,” Crow says.



How contractors scored economic recession and the presidential election on a scale of 1-10 (10 being very concerned)

6	Economic Recession	5.8	Presidential Election
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Leveraging LOW



Cost affordable landscaping can be a gateway into the industry,
and a revenue boost for companies ready to repair
work that didn't meet the customers' needs.

BALL

competition

Story by **Kim Lux** • Illustration by **Christina Chung**



Competition is inevitable. But what do you do when you're up against a company whose price is just so low you can't compete?

Joe Floyd Sr., owner of Impact Landscaping & Irrigation, in Jupiter, Florida, and Josh Newberry, owner of Chop's Turf Management in Monmouth, Illinois, say they both have to deal with lowball competitors, which was one of the top concerns according to Lawn & Landscape's 2020 State of the Industry report, but lowballers can come in all shapes and sizes.

FACING FIERCE COMPETITION. Newberry works a full-time job in addition to operating his landscaping company. Being from a small town, he says that a handful of landscapers are in constant competition with one another.

"There are probably only three or four commercial lawn care companies that we compete with," he says. "The majority of the lawn care done around here is the one guy, with one or two mowers. That's \$25 or under for yards."

Newberry says that while he doesn't worry too much about this kind of competition, it can be frustrating at times.

“This was the first year I had anybody say, ‘Hey, we’re going to be doing something different.’ All three of those yards that did that to me have all come back. One called and said, ‘He doesn’t string trim nice or take care of the nooks and crannies that you did.’”

JOSH NEWBERRY, OWNER,
CHOP’S TURF MANAGEMENT

“I can’t knock it,” he says. “When I was a kid, I rode around on my mower with my trailer and that’s how I started. It doesn’t hurt me. I’m at a number of yards that I’m comfortable with and I’m not upset that people are doing that. But I also know that we’re paying for insurance and taxes and everything else and those guys are just throwing the money in their pocket and moving on.”

Due to his type of clientele, the lowballers Floyd encounters look a bit different.

“We don’t tend to do individual residences, we tend to do big HOAs,” Floyd says. “Once you get in on a big HOA that has 1,000 homes, someone coming in to bid a job like that has to be prepared.”

Floyd says that most of his work is won through bidding processes. While he isn’t contending with guys who have mowers in the back of their trucks randomly finding lawns to mow, Floyd says that other companies intentionally submit lowball bids to try and win the work.

“We’ve got work with some of the bigger developers in South Florida, so naturally they want to get the work,” he says. “We’ll get some of the bigger guys who come in and try to lowball some stuff to try and get the work. Some of their numbers are crazy.”

Floyd notes that the joke is on them, because bidding at such a low price doesn’t allow for a nice net profit.

“It turns out they get the job and then find out they didn’t make any money. It turns out not to be worth it for them,” he says.

Newberry says that lowball competitors are unavoidable, and in a market like his, they even have their place in the industry.

“There’s a lot of people on fixed incomes...and those guys have their little niche in the people that don’t care what it looks like and just don’t want to get a call from the city about an overgrown lawn,” he says.

CLEANING UP THE MESS. Though Floyd and Newberry have both lost work to lowballers, they say their customers almost always come back.

Floyd says that he’s gotten plenty of calls about re-doing work done by someone who outbid him.

“There’s been times...that when it’s all said and done the president of the company, or whoever’s in charge, comes in and looks and says, ‘We’re not happy with this. Get a hold of Impact and get Joe Floyd over here to fix it,’” he says.

Floyd says that this is nothing new, and when he was first starting out, some developers would hire landscape architects to do the bare minimum, and then bring him in to push a project over the finish line.

Newberry says he lost three customers at the beginning of the year to cheaper competition.

“This was the first year I had anybody say, ‘Hey, we’re going to be doing something different.’ All three of those yards that did that to me have all come back,” he says. “One called and said, ‘He doesn’t string trim nice or take care of the nooks and crannies that you did.’”

Newberry says when those customers came back on board, he had to spend extra time getting their yards back in order.

“We had to go back in on most of them and do an initial clean-up to get the yard back straightened up, and then get back into our normal mowing cycle,” he says.



Joe Floyd Sr. says his business, Impact Landscaping & Irrigation, utilizes quality materials to bid its jobs fairly.



On a 1-10 scale, lowball competitors scored a mean of 5.7 on how concerned you are about it. Here's how it's scored by revenue segment:

LESS THAN \$300,000	\$300,000- \$999,999	MORE THAN \$1 MILLION
5.7	5.8	5.3

Newberry says his customers realized quickly that cheaper isn't always better. "The quality is obvious," he says.

PERFECTING YOUR PRICING. In terms of pricing, Newberry says quality speaks for itself and the quality of his work allows him to charge more.

"What we're known for is high quality," he says. "Our services really drive our pricing and we're able to price ourselves a little bit higher. People are willing to pay it. We've really been trying to push the market up and show people what we can do versus the \$20 lawn mow."

Going into this year, Newberry says he actually raised prices.

"We had done an increase on costs for all our mowing properties this year," he

says. "We've evolved our company and set up the full LLC. We also changed our direction a bit to gear toward more commercial, so we had to increase pricing a little."

But the economy still plays a factor in what Newberry will charge for a job.

"We're in a small market. Monmouth is a town of 10,000 people," he says. "We're in a medium- to low-income economy and that really drives our pricing. We fairly price for teachers, elderly people and some people we know. We know that they're on a fixed income, or that the teachers around here just don't make a lot of money, so we try to give them a fair deal."

Despite pricing competitively, Newberry says there's still plenty of people

who just aren't interested in improving their lawns.

"Out of the 50 yards we have, I'd say five are actually interested in making their lawn better," Newberry says.

In the South Florida market, Floyd says he finds himself about average with the competition.

"We're competitive with our pricing. We've had our pricing pretty much the same for quite some time," he says. "We'll adjust with the market and what materials have sold for...but we've been pretty consistent all along."

Floyd says he's been able to grow Impact by having great relationships with his clients.

"The reason I think we get so many projects is because, from the top down, our employees truly care and we provide top-quality materials from our supplier," he says. "And there's just a lot of positivity. We get along with our customers so well that they understand our pricing and know we're fair about how we do it."

By keeping their prices competitive, Floyd says his company has still been able to grow in despite the hardships the COVID-19 pandemic caused.

"We bid so much different work. Generally, our contractors want us on the job," he says. "Through the pandemic, we've continued hiring people because we kept getting other jobs." •

What do you charge, on average, per hour for labor for each of the following services?

LANDSCAPE DESIGN/ CONSTRUCTION

\$73.25

IRRIGATION

\$70.98

TREES & ORNAMENTAL

\$69.98

LAWN CARE/ CHEMICAL APP.

\$65.14

LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE

\$57.85

TUESDAY, NOV. 10; 3 P.M. ET

Join Lawn & Landscape Editor Brian Horn as

he discusses the State of the Industry with industry professionals. Topics will include, local and national trends, lessons learned in the past year, COVID-19's impact moving forward and much more. Visit **bit.ly/2020lawn** or scan the QR code below to register.

TOPICS INCLUDE

- Major concerns and solutions for those concerns
 - Trends for 2020 and beyond
 - Growth opportunities
- AND MUCH MORE!**

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EQUIPMENT EQUATION

MIKE HAD A \$5 MILLION LANDSCAPE INSTALLATION company but was barely breaking even. He told me that he never made more than 2-3% net profit on his bottom line. He also told me that the more sales he had, the less money he made. He was missing about \$550,000 (10%) in net profit. How'd you like to do \$5 million in business and barely break even?

Mike's primary problem was the way that he estimated his T&E costs in his bids. He'd divide the \$800,000 T&E costs on his P&L by his projected 80,000 billable field-labor hours and obtain \$10 (\$800,000 ÷ 80,000 = \$10). If a job contained 1,000 billable field-labor hours, he'd include \$10,000 (\$10 x 1,000) of T&E costs in his bid. *Theoretically*, if he sold 80,000 billable field-labor hours, he'd recover all \$800,000 of T&E costs or so it seemed.

Total annual sales	\$5,000,000	
Total T&E costs on the P&L	\$800,000	16% of sales
GREEN INDUSTRY x BENCHMARKS FOR TOTAL T&E COSTS AS A PERCENT OF SALES		
Fuel		3% - 4%
Mechanics, parts, repairs		3% - 4%
Misc (truck, auto & Inland Marine insurance, etc.)		1% - 2%
Straight-line depreciation*		2% - 4%
Total		12% +/-3%

* Asset cost minus salvage value spread over useful life of asset.

The total of T&E costs for the majority of Green Industry companies falls between 10 to 14% of sales. General and administrative (G&A) overhead vehicles for owners, project and account managers, etc. account for 2 of the 12%. Your totals may vary slightly from mine, but my figures should provide an accurate starting point.

Contractors who keep their trucks and equipment until they rust to death, will see their depreciation percent decline while the mechanics, parts and repairs percent will increase. Comparing your T&E costs to my benchmarks over a three- or five-year period will often shed a lot of light on your truck and equipment practices and purchases. It will also help you conduct a cost-benefit analysis when it comes to purchasing trucks and equipment.

	JOB A	JOB B	REMARKS
Mike's estimated T&E costs	\$10,000	\$10,000	(1,000 Mhrs x \$10.00 EqCPH)
Actual T&E costs	\$20,000	\$4,000	
Over/under stated costs	\$10,000 (Understated costs)	\$6,000	Overstated costs
Net profit + G&A overhead (20%)	\$2,000 (Also understated)	\$1,200	Also overstated
Bid too high or too low	\$12,000 (Bid too low)	\$7,200	Bid too high

Back to Mike. Exactly \$257,000 of the \$800,000 T&E costs were included in bids and paid by clients. I'm a little slow at these things but it seems to me that if your costs are \$800,000 and your clients pay \$257,000 of it, you have \$543,000 in T&E costs that you have to eat. Add a 10 % net profit margin to this and we have found \$600,000 of missing revenue.

Mike had a fatal mathematical error in his bidding methods. Let's analyze two bids each containing 1,000 billable field-labor hours. Job A requires crew trucks, skid-steers, mini-excavators, trenchers, etc. Its T&E cost per hour (EqCPH) is approximately \$20 per man-hour. Job B only requires pickup trucks and wheelbarrows. Its EqCPH is roughly \$4 per man-hour (*chart at bottom left*).

Mike's cost estimating method for trucks and equipment seemed logical. You add \$10 for every billable field-labor hour in a bid to pass your \$800,000 T&E costs on to your customers. However, it contained an error. Assuming Jobs A & B would each be approximately \$100,000, Job A was priced \$12,000 or 12% too low. Job B was priced \$7,200 or 7% too high. Mike constantly won bids that he bid too low. The more work that he won, the more money he lost. He'd win equipment-intense jobs because he under-priced them. He wouldn't win labor-intense jobs because he over-priced them.

The good news was that we found the missing \$600,000. Mike's revenue for the work that he did should have been \$5,600,000 not \$5,000,000. This would have given him about a 10% net profit margin. Unfortunately, for Mike it was too late and he lost his company. Next time, we'll talk more about the truck and equipment costs in your business and how to ensure that you pass these costs on to your customers. **L&L**

EVALUATING TRUCK AND EQUIPMENT COSTS CORRECTLY CAN BE VITAL. This example shows what can happen if you are calculating it wrong.



WORDS OF WILSON

WITH JOE KUJAWA
SENIOR FACILITATOR

WORDS OF WILSON features a rotating panel of consultants from Bruce Wilson & Company, a landscape consulting firm.

PLANNING FOR 2021? THINK LIKE A START-UP

→ **STRATEGIC PLANNING CAN BE TOUGH** in a normal year. This year, it has been anything but normal as the coronavirus trampled the rulebook and forced businesses to cope with urgent needs, and change and adapt on a massive scale.

Although we don't know about what next year will bring, here are six short- and mid-term strategic ways you can deal with uncertainty and improve your 2021 recovery planning.

EXPECT CHALLENGES. The virus' disruptive impact across sectors will carry into 2021. Demand has been reduced, budgets are tight and virtual life is real life. Commercial clients' have found out they do not need as much real-estate/office space and are under often severe cost-cutting measures. Residential clients may have reduced income from either a spouse leaving the workforce to stay home with their children or they may have been furloughed or let go.

Internally, your own company has probably reduced overhead and implemented budget cuts to get through this year. There are not a lot of areas left to cut. The temporary help of PPP loans does not look like it will be available again any time soon, and regardless of who wins in November, there will be social and economic fallout that will last well into the New Year.

HAVE A PLAN B (AND C, D AND E). Contingency planning should focus on scenarios for risk, opportunity and ways to become more operationally agile and resilient. Concerns such as a potential second wave during the traditional flu season; the timing and effectiveness of a possible vaccine; and trends that have economic implications will all frame planning discussions.

Speed and the ability to take decisive action will be key. Make sure your plans consider alternatives when thinking about staffing, revenue targets, capacity and capital spending. Give your team creative license to innovate and contribute to change the way you do business. Necessity has a way of bringing out the best in a team.

MAINTAIN FOCUS ON YOUR CORE. Much of 2020 has been about surviving and adapting to change. Companies have altered services and delivery models, expanded or contracted reach and adjusted internal processes and staffing. For 2021, focus on re-defining your full potential, consider deep strategic change to improve performance, find new ways to tap insights into new and existing customers and make flexibility your new growth driver.

INVEST IN MARKETING. In times like these, word of mouth will not be

enough. Pipeline generation, community relationships, networking alternatives, positive PR, communications strategies can all help the top line get moving again. Cutting marketing just hands more business to your competitors. Ironically, new clients may be easier to find as less sophisticated competitors go out of business or fall back.

USE TECHNOLOGY AND FOLLOW THE

NUMBERS. Zoom calls, virtual site visits, drone photography, video marketing, digital proposals and e-signatures will be business as usual in 2021. Even as physical workspace opens up, many clients and companies may prefer the cost- and time-effectiveness of virtual meetings. As client interactions go virtual, invest in ways to become a polished presenter, master video production techniques and virtual meeting etiquette. Technology-led innovation and data will be your competitive advantage. Make sure to understand the true cost and benefit of each service you provide, which types of clients are most profitable, and invest in benchmarking to strengthen your performance.

BE HONEST. No industry is going to make it through this pandemic untouched and some companies won't make it through at all. Are you well positioned for next year? Really look at your numbers, your business and your personal goals. Would you be better off to join a more stable organization? Some contractors are struggling financially. Some don't want another year of anxiety. For contractors that were doing well pre-COVID 19, it may make sense for them to align with a bigger company. Likewise, if your company is well positioned for the New Year, there may be an opportunity for you to complete a strategic acquisition that will help you really take off when the pandemic is over. **L&L**

↓
WHEN PLANNING FOR 2021, make sure you have contingency plans in place and expect the challenges to continue.

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A GUIDE TO GIVING

→ **THE PAST SIX MONTHS** have been unlike any other both in our business and personal lives. Even with lawn care and landscape services considered essential in most of the U.S., we've had to adapt our businesses to keep both our employees and customers safe.

Throughout the pandemic – and faced with a lot of uncertainty – timely communication became a central tenet that successful companies embraced. Transparency and candid communications settled unease and frayed nerves and – maybe more than anything else – created a feeling of community. A feeling that we're all in this together vs. working independently and/or against each other resulted in a surprising calm.

In addition to the many logistical, health, technical and other strategic changes businesses had to make, a renewed or increased sense of empathy has become evident across the landscape industry.

Why do people volunteer and give back? People volunteer for many reasons. For some, it's a chance to give back to their community in which they reside or earn a living. For others, it's about the people and making a difference in someone's life.

TWELVE REASONS WHY PEOPLE VOLUNTEER

1. Personal tie to a cause
2. Help others
3. Make a difference
4. Connect with your community
5. Feel involved
6. Develop new skills or build on existing experience
7. Build or enhance a resume
8. Setting a good example for others
9. Meeting like-minded, motivated people
10. Gain unique and exciting opportunities
11. Gain greater perspective and self-awareness
12. Simply put, it's good for you

The Harvesters encourage volunteering in our communities and actively participate in numerous industry specific programs. Contractors are uniquely qualified to lend their time and talents to a cause. They can make a significant difference in performing services that come second nature to them, but that are difference-makers to neighborhoods, cities and individuals across the country.

Here are some industry-specific volunteer programs that we recommend:

GREENCARE FOR TROOPS/GREENCARE FOR OUR HEALTHCARE HEROES is a nationwide program from Project EverGreen. This

program makes it easy to help an active duty military family in need in your community. It's as easy as adding one more family to an established route. In the registration process, contractors can select how many families they can help, what services they can provide and how far they are willing to travel. Those metrics are matched with those of a family in your service area. Services are provided free of charge to the military family for the length of deployment, which is generally nine months to one year. The program has been expanded to include health care heroes serving on the front lines of the pandemic.

GREENCARE FOR COMMUNITIES is another nationwide initiative from Project EverGreen. The program helps revitalize, restore and enhance urban parks, playing fields and public green spaces in need. Greener, healthier, cooler parks and green spaces turn the tide for communities in five ways:

1. Outdoor enjoyment
2. Healthier lifestyles
3. Economic growth
4. Community development
5. Environmental benefits

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CHANGE OF PLANS

THE TURNAROUND TOUR COMPANIES HAD TO TWEAK STRATEGIES A BIT AFTER COVID-19 HIT.



David Hawkins Jr., left, with his son David Hawkins III, will finish out the year by getting more organized and begin transferring leadership over to Hawkins III.

Keep it rolling

BY JIMMY MILLER

David Hawkins Jr., and his team at Hawkins Landscaping planned on trying to land a lot of commercial clients this year. Plans have since changed on a dime.

"Once COVID started, commercial work just fell out," Hawkins says. "We have some of those (commercial accounts), and they haven't quite spent the money like they normally would. They're just doing the bare bones to get by."

That doesn't mean business is bad. Hawkins estimates their revenue figure will actually hover right around where it was last year, and that's in large part due to their high-level residential accounts. Where they're located in Maryland, restrictions on landscapers are among the lowest in the country, Hawkins says.

Even during the middle of a widespread

quarantine, his work was considered essential, so in some ways, they kept business rolling without missing a beat. Hawkins says they also kept busy with aeration and overseeding services, too.

"People are taking their vacation money and putting it into their yards," he says. "When (the pandemic) first happened, people panicked a little bit, but I think a majority of people are balancing out."

As business slows down for the impending winter, Hawkins says they're also going to continue working on some of the Harvesters' other initiatives. The big elephant in the room had been transitioning ownership from Hawkins Jr. to David Hawkins III, his son, who Hawkins Jr. says is already handling most day-to-day work as it is.

Hawkins says he could work another 10 years or so before retiring, but they want to

get the formal transition of leadership moving. Part of that involves figuring out insurance and refinancing the team's farm, plus factoring in an economic downturn that he and the Harvesters say is impending.

Additionally, they're working on getting more organized with the team's budget. They planned to shift under the Harvesters' mini budget but couldn't get to that before the pandemic struck and changed course for everything. Hawkins says they'll reexamine their "on-the-fly" budget in the offseason but is ultimately glad with everything they've worked on so far.

"Most people don't make changes very quickly or easily," Hawkins says. "We want to, but it's just getting there. We're taking little steps and those become big steps."

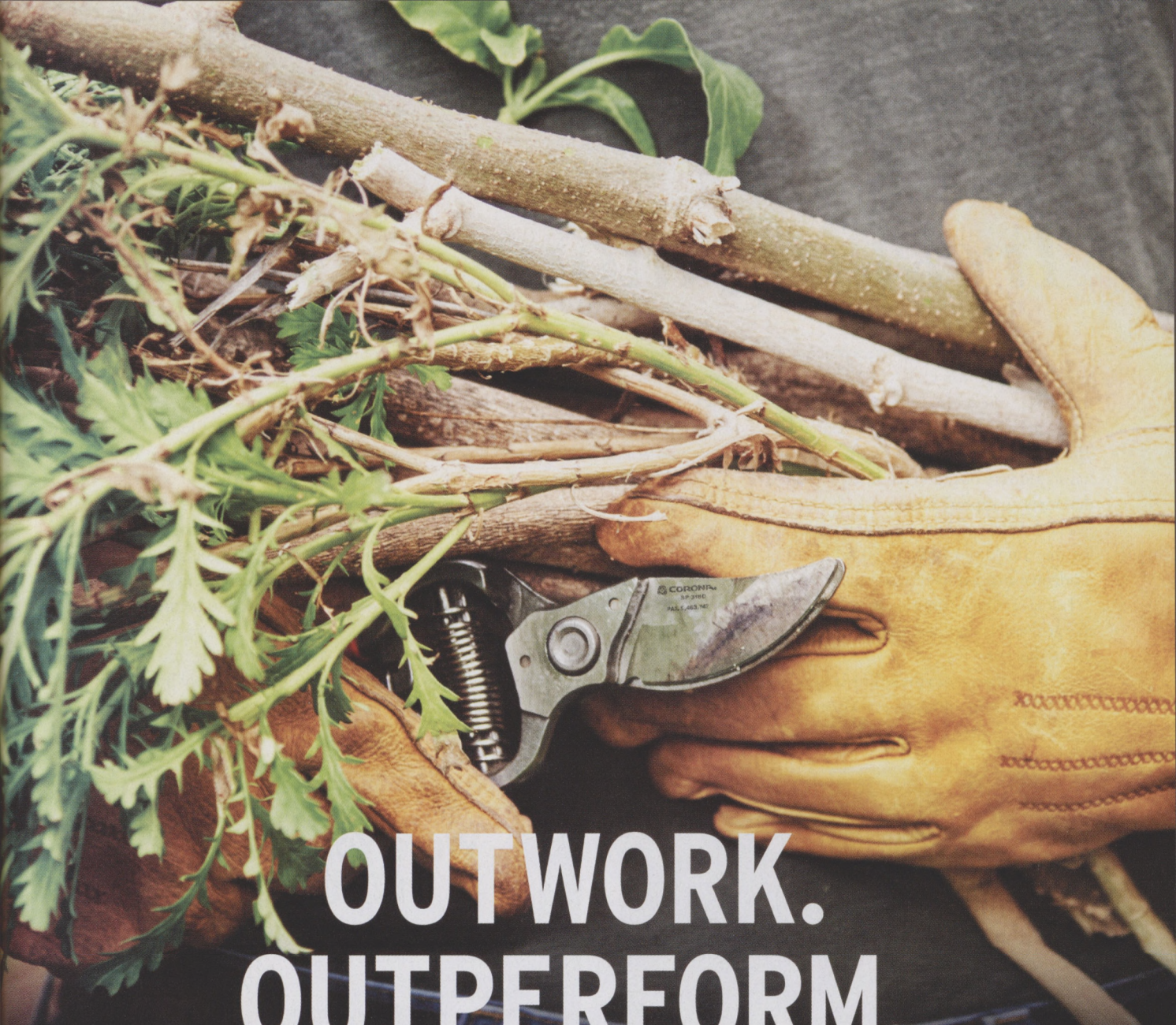
THE HARVESTERS' TAKE. Pricing is getting tighter and tighter and the residential install back log is getting a bit thin. The Hawkins team is working on ways to deal with a changing market.

We are working with them to get in place a better screening process to help delineate shoppers vs. viable targeted accounts, prioritize install projects that have a higher potential for long range maintenance recurring revenue, among other steps.

Long-term, we want them to build maintenance revenue to the \$1 million level to help make business more sustainable with less emphasis on installs. A couple of ways to do that is trying to sell maintenance to targeted jobs that were installed and building selection criteria for maintenance targets.

The Harvesters also suggested that a five-year plan be put into place for the legacy transition of the business from David (Dad) to David (Son). This is an area all family businesses should consider well in advance of the actual transition.

After several meetings with the Harvesters and family members along with some great spirited "open dialogue," the Hawkins now have a framework of a game plan with several options to decide on. 🌱






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Trekking along

BY KIM LUX

After some employees tested positive for COVID-19 earlier in the spring, the company hasn't had a case as of early September. The good news continues as the company has stayed very busy and has hired a business developer to capture more work.

Frank Leloia and the Harvesters set a goal for the company to have a 50-50 blend of residential and commercial accounts by 2022.

Leloia says he'll continue working toward this goal and is optimistic about the remainder of the year.

"We're coming into the selling season," he says. "We've seen some requests for proposals

come in, but we feel confident going into next year."

While COVID-19 has impacted some of his commercial clients, Leloia says there are others who've been thriving.

"There's definitely going to be some commercial places that are more affected, like shopping malls, retail centers and maybe even office complexes with everyone working from home," he says. "It's funny, but we've seen HOAs spending more money than ever on their grounds...We've also seen bigger industrial centers be busier than ever, too."

Along with securing more commercial work, Leloia says the Harvesters are also

helping him get more acquainted with the company's finances.

"We've really been focusing on organizing our financials and knowing our numbers from an operational standpoint and an expense standpoint," he says.

"We've really been focusing on that and gross margins and strategizing on how to improve them. It's nice knowing what our gross margin goals are. We can operate our business more efficiently to hit them."

Improvements in HR are also a priority for Leloia by finalizing a handbook and some other policies. With so much going on, it's important for Leloia to stay focused on the right tasks.

"Basically, I need to be focused more on the business side of things rather than the day-to-day involvement; not that I should stop doing that completely but lean off of it a little bit," he says.



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



Frank Leloia Jr. (left) is taking the time to dive deeper into Custom Landscaping and Lawn Care's financials.

While finishing out the year with the Harvesters' help, Leloia says he's stay committed to knowing the numbers even better.

"We just want to continue to know our numbers better and have a more clear, defined

roadmap for where we are as a business now, and where we want to go," he says. "And we want to continue to work on that plan and go after it."

THE HARVESTERS' TAKE. Some of the excellent advances Custom Lawn Care has made was to separate the various profit centers in QuickBooks. The actual changes in the chart of accounts was done with the aid of an outside QuickBooks expert.

Now the company knows their gross margins by the month, per department. Leloia is also working with the Harvest Mini Budget.

With this tool, he can obtain his gross margins by the week for each department. He told us his eyes have been fully opened now in that he can see just how low some of his residential work is performing at and can now make the needed changes.

The Harvesters have suggested to Frank from their initial visit that strategically he would be better off to fully move into commercial work and as new contracts are obtained, reduce the amount of small residential clients the company is maintaining. In July, he hired an experienced salesperson that is concentrating on expanding this department.

One area that the Harvesters have spent considerable time in talking with Leloia about is whether to create a totally separate business with his lawn care department or keep it part of Custom Lawn Care. Frank will be taking advantage of having a future conference call with the Harvest Group to weigh the pros and cons of such a move.

All in all, Frank and his people are doing extremely well and will exceed both their sales and profit projections this season. ()

Continues on pg. 126

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IDOLIZED for INTEGRITY



For over 50 years, J. Landon Reeve IV committed himself to elevating the green industry.

By Kim Lux

ABOVE: Landon Reeve, second from left, started Chapel Valley Landscape Company in 1968, and under him it became a leader in the DC market.

From starting his own landscape company to serving as president of the Associated Landscape Contractors of America (now NALP), John Landon Reeve, IV, touched countless lives over his 50-plus year career.

The industry icon died on May 25, 2020, at the age of 79.

Landon's family and friends say that while he did so much for the industry, he will be remembered most for pushing professionalism.

"Elevating the industry's professionalism was at the core for him," said James Reeve, Landon's son and the current president and CEO of Chapel Valley. "He liked to share best practices because in landscaping there weren't really standards at the time. It was kind of all over the board. He

helped create standard specifications that everyone could bid off of."

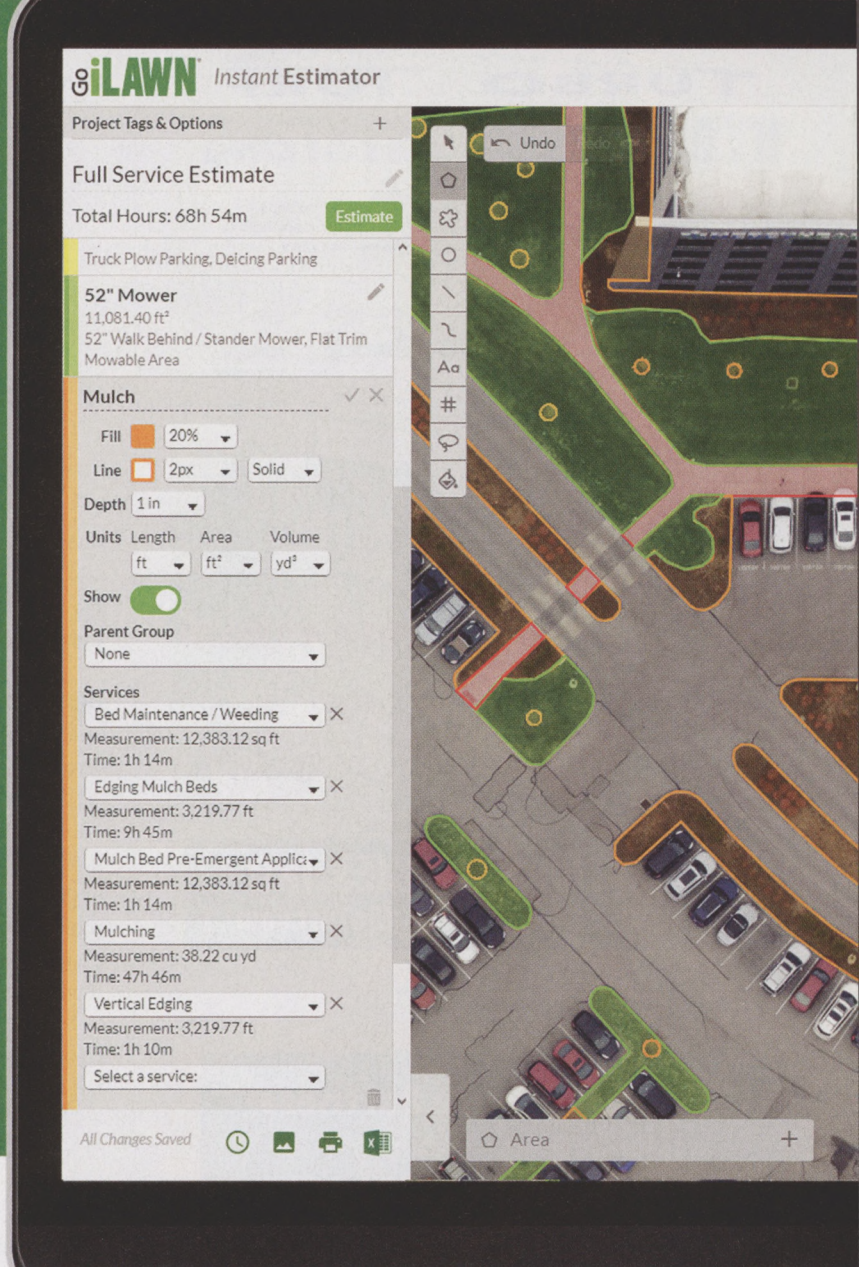
Landon, a Maryland native, worked at a local nursery during high school and attended the University of Maryland, where he received a Bachelor of Science degree in ornamental horticulture in 1963.

In 1968, Landon and his first wife, Janet, started Chapel Valley Landscape Company in Howard County, Md. Over the years, Landon grew the company, which started with only three employees, to where it is today – employing over 450 team members and operating in seven markets in the Mid-Atlantic and Southeast regions.

While simultaneously growing his company, Landon served as president of numerous national and local organizations. He was the past president

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IN MEMORIAM

“He definitely led through example. His commitment to training always came through. He had great vision, and I think that inspired his people.”

MICHAEL CURRIN, founder of Greenscape

of ALCA; the Landscape Contractor' Association of MD, D.C. and VA; and the Maryland Nursery, Landscape and Greenhouse Association. He also had been a member of the American Horticultural Society since 1988 and served on the board of directors from 2006 to 2019.

DRESS FOR SUCCESS. To help raise up the industry, Landon helped establish professional and safety standards and promoted training and certifications programs.

“I think he'll be basically remembered for just that – elevating the industry...and professionalizing a very unprofessional industry,” James says. “When Landon first got into the industry, it was mostly a bunch of guys in cut-off jean shorts and no shirts. He didn't think it looked professional. One of the first things he did at Chapel Valley was have everyone wear uniforms. That kind of took off across our market and then went into other markets.”

Michael Currin, founder of Greenscape in Fayetteville, N.C., and a colleague of Landon's, also feels Landon's dedication to professionalism has helped to improve the industry.

“In the industry, Landon created the kind of persona and the kind of image of professionalism that allowed us, and others, to move the industry from a ‘Ma and Pa’ operation to the professional industry it is today. I give him a lot of credit for that,” Currin says. “He'll be remembered for driving the professionalism and his commitment to training and people development.”

LEADING BY EXAMPLE. Currin remembers being introduced to Landon for the first time back in the late 1970s.

“The first time I ever remember seeing Landon was when I went to Louisville for what was called the Garden Centers of America Landscape Conference,” he says. “Landon was there and did a presentation on a big apple tree that they moved in downtown Washington that was on federal property... I remember thinking he's got his act together and knows what he's doing. At the time I was really young and new in the industry.”

Through their time spent together with the ALCA, Currin says he got to see first-hand what kind of leader Landon was.

“He was the best kind of leader,” he says. “He was a leader who had high expectations of his people, but he was a people person. He definitely led through example. His commitment to training always came through. He had great vision, and I think that inspired his people.”

James says Landon's leadership style was more about teaching than demanding.

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“I can’t think of a better company... that reached the level Chapel Valley did under his leadership.”

RON EYRE, Landon’s close friend

“He was firm but fair,” James says. “He was very giving of his time and very willing to coach.”

Ron Eyre, a close friend of Landon’s for over 48 years, says you could see Landon’s influence on his team’s work.

Eyre, the founder of a motor coach company and the owner of several shopping centers, says all the work Chapel Valley did for him was remarkable.

“They’ve had excellent help and excellent designers. He (Landon) was committed to excellence and had a desire to always be the best,” Eyre says.

Over the years, Chapel Valley was responsible for maintaining many iconic properties including the Hirshhorn Museum and Sculpture Garden, the Basilica of the National Shrine and the Vietnam Veteran’s Memorial.

Eyre adds Chapel Valley’s success is a

testament to Landon’s leadership.

“I can’t think of a better company, that was created through sweat equity, that reached the level Chapel Valley did under his leadership,” he says. “He’s led a company that started from nothing and ended up as an industry icon. I think that his legacy in the work that was done in the nation’s capital, in major projects designed and implemented by Chapel Valley, will live on forever.”

STEADFAST SERVICE. Throughout his life, Landon graciously volunteered his time to many organizations throughout the industry.

“Landon was a big believer in giving back to the industry,” Eyre says. “He served on national boards and came up with creative business planning to continue to help companies be more successful on how they operate internally... Everything that Landon



Landon received the 2020 Meritorious Service Award from the American Horticulture Society for his volunteerism.



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I think he'll be remembered for just that—elevating the industry.”

JAMES REEVE, CEO and president of Chapel Valley

touched, he would give back to it. When he received something of great benefit, it meant a lot to him to give back to it so others could benefit from his success and his leadership.”

Landon also helped young people interested in the industry by starting scholarships and donating funds for gardens.

At the American Horticultural Society headquarters, Chapel Valley has been providing its maintenance for years. Landon was also recognized as the 2020 recipient of the society's Meritorious Service Award for outstanding service.

“He was heavily involved in the American Horticulture Society and he and his second wife, Dallas, chaired some of their annual events, which were attended by hundreds of people,” Eyre recalls.

Currin says Landon's generosity won't be forgotten.

“The other thing he certainly will be remembered for is what he gave back to the industry,” he says.

WORDS FROM THE WISE. James says he always knew he wanted to join the family business.

“I worked at the company since I was 11 part-time, and went full-time when I was 21,” he says.

James acknowledges his father gave him plenty of advice over the years, but there's one mantra of his that James, and the rest of Chapel Valley, still focus on.

“The main thing, which I still preach to this day, not only to Chapel Valley but to my family, is do it right the first time,” he says.

Eyre said that while he and Landon were in different industries, they still bonded over how to operate a respectable business.

“We would talk business quite frequently

and the principles that make a successful company,” he says. “We talked about how you have to take care of your employees and be a man of your word.”

Currin says Landon gave him plenty of advice over the years as well.

“One of the subjects we often talked about was the transition aspect from one generation to the next. He had a lot of insight into that,” he says.

Following Landon's retirement, Currin even brought him down to Greenscape to work with his team.

“After he slowed down some, I actually hired him to come and do some consulting,” he says. “He came several times in those latter years. He helped us do strategic planning and some other things.” But the best piece of advice Currin ever got from Landon was more about family than landscaping.



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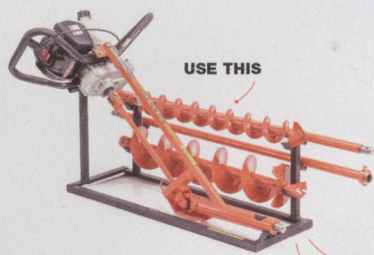
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"One of the things I learned very early on from Landon was that your company was not the basis of your whole life and focus, but that your company was intended to be the means to the lifestyle that you wanted for your family," he says. "Landon had a lot of diverse interests other than just work. Family was extremely important to him."

MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE. Outside of the industry, Landon was just a quiet man who loved and doted on his family.

Landon also loved to travel, and Eyre says he has many fond memories of traveling with him.

"We traveled with them a lot," he says. "Landon and Janet would join us, and then Dallas joined us as well. We took a lot of international trips together."

Eyre says Landon's good nature shined through no matter what their trips entailed.

"We took a trip to Italy that started in Milan and ended in Sicily and it was a trip, like life, (that) had its ups and downs," he says. "And Landon handed it with the best of grace. Dallas, too, was also a big believer in travel being an experience."

James says through his upbringing, his father encouraged a love of travel in him as well.

"One of Landon's favorite things was to travel," he says. "He traveled all over the world pretty much repeatedly. As kids, travel and exposing us to different people, lifestyles and cultures was very important to him. Ultimately, it's become important to me."

During his many travels, Landon enjoyed touring famed gardens all over the globe.

"He was a horticulturist at heart in a lot of ways," Currin says.

Eyre adds what most people didn't know about Landon was that he was also a devoted caregiver to both his late wives, who struggled with serious health issues.

"Another thing was his love, compassion and support of both of his wives who struggled for years with their health," he says. "Whatever they needed; he was there. He was always there for them and was the most dedicated husband."

Currin, Eyre and James believe it was Landon's warm personality that drew people to him.

"Landon was always a class act," Eyre says. "He was very stoic in how he presented himself. He was never boastful or arrogant. He was quiet and understated."

Currin says Landon never made anybody feel anything but important.

"Landon was the kind of person that no matter who you were when you met him, he treated you with great respect," he says. "He never made you feel inferior because of what he had accomplished. That was true throughout his career. He'd give you more time than you'd think someone who was at the level of responsibility he was at could."

James says he hopes this is how people remember his father.

"He was genuine," James says. "He always had a smile on his face and people have said he had a twinkle in his eye and a good sense of humor." **L&L**



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By Brian Horn



After being diagnosed with a genetic disease at a young age, Aiden Silvers operates his own company – Wheelistic Design.

With his right thumb and left hand and cheek, Aiden Silvers has all the muscle he needs physically to help design websites for his clients.

The 25-year-old Florida resident operates Wheelistic Design, a digital marketing agency, and has Spinal Muscular Atrophy Type 2, a genetic disease affecting the central nervous system, peripheral nervous system and voluntary muscle movement (skeletal muscle), according to the Muscular Dystrophy Association.

He was diagnosed with the disease at about 2 years of age.

Silvers is unable to gain strength and over time, the disease will reduce strength until the point that muscles die. Silvers says he went from a normal functioning body over the years to now having 24/7 nursing care to do everything for him.

“My muscles are severely weak,” he says. “I have 1% strength compared to the normal, average person.”

But that doesn’t stop him from putting in 12-hour workdays with Wheelistic, which employs five people.

The most strength he has is in his right thumb, which is what he uses to left-click the mouse. He has an additional mouse in his left hand and has it set on a book with a mousepad. He uses that hand to move the mouse/cursor with help from his chin/cheek area.

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PROFILE

I really get along with a lot of people in the green industry. They are very humble and down-to-earth and I can speak to them freely without worrying about any type of judgment."

AIDEN SILVERS, owner, Wheelistic Design

To type, he uses the on-screen keyboard and clicks each letter/command. He does all of this lying down. Both mice are very small and easy to move and click so that he can go a full day without fatigue, he says.

"You would imagine that would be a slow process using that method, but I operate like that on a day-to-day basis," he says. "It's not like it's too much of a physical load because I've been doing it so long."

Silvers needs to continue to work because if he stops using his muscles for too long, the strength may never return. As an example, Silvers says when he was younger, he used to play gaming consoles like Xbox and PlayStation. He decided to give computer games a try for a little bit, but controlling the game was different. When he went back to consoles a few months later, the muscles he used to control those games were no longer there.

"Because of my disease, I can't build muscle," he says. "If I don't maintain what I have then you can kiss it goodbye pretty much. The little things I can do now, I appreciate what I have. I have to make sure every day to work at it a little bit even if it's something ridiculous like turning my head or whatever it may be."

GREETING GREEN. For the first five or so years, Silvers said his clientele was a diverse mix of industries, but in the past two, he's grown his presence in the green industry with about 90% of his clients being landscaping companies.

His introduction to the industry was through the Lawn Life Facebook group. He joined the group and did some free work for members, which led the group to push his services. Eventually, he became the administrator of the group and realized he enjoyed working with landscapers.

"I really get along with a lot of people in the green industry," he says. "They are very humble and down-to-earth and I can speak to them freely without worrying about any type of judgment."

Silvers says COVID-19 did slow business down a little, but the slow-down was needed because it gave him time to focus on the company's internal process as the business continues to grow. With that growth will come more work, which won't be a problem for Silvers even if he loses all of his muscles.

"Eventually, there may come a time where, for whatever reason, I need to switch to adaptive speech recognition software and other technologies, but I will remain using my current method until forced into an alternative." **L&L**

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SILVER LININGS

State shutdowns because of COVID-19 effected fuel budgets. **By Catherine Meany**

As COVID-19 spread across the U.S., business as usual came to a screeching halt for many companies. Landscaping businesses felt both ill effects and even some positives resulting from virus-related restrictions. One of those areas where contractors found a silver lining was fuel management. With less traffic on the roads and fuel costs at historic lows, COVID-19 restrictions often gave way for more efficient business operations.

"As this unfolded, it was like a ghost town. When I came to work in the morning, I would see four to five cars where I would normally see too many cars to count," says Michael Kravitsky IV, president of Grasshopper Lawns in Pennsylvania.

The same was true in Ohio, where crews

at Royse Lawn Care enjoyed about a month of clear roads along their typically congested routes. Instead of payroll hours ticking by while sitting in heavy interstate traffic, crews could get done much earlier in the day, Nathan Royse says.

"It did make a big difference. At some point every day, it seems like there's at least one truck stuck in traffic or going around a closed road somewhere," Royse says. "So, it absolutely made us more efficient because we could get around easier."

Candice Jenkins, of Jenkins Lawn Care in Missouri, also says that with less traffic, it was much faster and easier for her crews to maneuver through the shopping centers that they service. On the flip side, they did lose some business from their smaller commercial sites that were forced to close and cut expenses.



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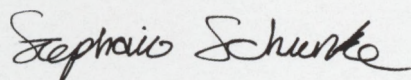
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“It has become even more clear this year just how appreciated and respected this industry is.”



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GIVING VOICE TO THE GREEN INDUSTRY

Longtime industry communicator Cindy Code excels at sharing the importance of green spaces.

By Robin Roenker

ABOVE: Code, with Detroit Mayor Mike Duggan, at a Project EverGreen event where the group helped makeover a local park.

AS FORMER EDITOR and publisher of *Lawn & Landscape* magazine – and one of the field’s most respected journalists – Cindy Code has long been a leading voice for the green industry. In her current role as executive director of Project EverGreen, Code gets to keep doing what she does best: advocating for the importance of green spaces and the dedicated professionals who maintain them.

Finding a home

With a freshly minted journalism degree from Ohio University in hand, at 23, Code found herself with an offer to join GIE Media as an editor at *Lawn Care Professional* magazine. When GIE acquired what would eventually become *Lawn & Landscape*, Code became the magazine’s first assistant editor.

“I didn’t know anything about GIE Media or the green industry at the time, but one thing led to another,” says Code, a Cleveland native who went on to spend 22 years with *Lawn & Landscape* magazine – first as an editor and later as publisher and group publisher – before leaving GIE in 2009 to open her own green industry consulting firm.

“Cindy joined GIE media as an assistant editor, but it didn’t take long for her to demonstrate her journalism strengths and a passion for the professional landscape market,” says Richard Foster, GIE’s founder and chairman, who counts Code as a personal friend.

“Cindy was a driving force behind our *Lawn & Landscape* media business for two decades, taking the magazine from a number four position in a crowded market to become the leading magazine serving the industry.”

While Code admits she initially took the job at GIE thinking she might move on to something else after a few years, something about the green industry clicked – and she never wanted to leave.

“It ended up being very fortuitous,” Code says of her first job offer, which evolved into a long-term career. “We were able to do some really exciting things with the magazine, helping it grow at the same time the industry was evolving and growing. I never expected when I took the job all those years ago that the green industry would end up being such a home to me. But it does, it still feels like home.”

Finding a mission

When Code first started at *Lawn & Landscape*, the magazine was small, averaging just 60 pages. But under her leadership it grew to a height of 200 pages, she says, thanks in part to the robust growth and evolution underway in the industry at the time.

“The lawn and landscape industry was starting to



“You can’t underestimate the value of a healthy and thriving public park. It has the ability to transform neighborhoods and people’s lives.”

Cindy Code, executive director, Project EverGreen

evolve into the full-service industry that it is today,” Code says. “Companies were learning to diversify, offering new services such as design/build, irrigation and tree care. I learned a lot from talking to the business owners in the industry – learning what made them tick and how they grew their businesses.”

While at Lawn & Landscape, Code had ample opportunity to write about the many merits of the green industry, from its role in increasing property values and protecting the environment to its power to enhance and beautify people’s lives.

“We spent a lot of time talking about how great the industry is and how lucky we are to be a part of it – and how the green industry changes people’s lives for the better,” recalls Code, who was inducted into the Turf and Ornamental Communicators (TOCA) Hall of Fame in 2014. “But at times it felt as if we were preaching to the choir. We realized it was important to find ways to help

people outside of our industry to recognize the value of this work as well.”

The result: Code, Den Gardner, Norm Goldenberg, Phil Fogarty, Paul McDonough, Tom Delaney and several other key players in the industry joined forces in 2003 to launch Project EverGreen with support from a \$50,000 initial donation from the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (a legacy organization of the National Association of Landscape Professionals).

“It started as a (public relations) initiative with billboards and bus signs that talked about all the positive benefits of green spaces,” Code says. After the 2008-09 recession, the nonprofit shifted to a project-based platform to, as Code puts it, “bring our messages to life.”

Since 2011, Code has served as executive director for Project EverGreen, which today offers programs to support green space makeovers in city parks and public spaces across the country and to provide free landscap-

Cindy finds ways to connect the entrepreneurs of this industry while shining a bright light on the best of what we do and how we do it."

Phil Fogarty, Weed Man sub-franchisor

ing and snow removal services to families of active duty servicemen and women through GreenCare for Troops and SnowCare for Troops.

Project EverGreen partners closely with city parks and recreation and public works departments, local governments, resident volunteers and local lawn and landscape companies – which often donate their materials and services – to make its community green space makeovers happen.

"We get buy-in from the parks department because they're going to have to sustain it, and participation from community residents because the park is ultimately theirs," Code says. "You can't underestimate the value of a healthy and thriving public park. It has the ability to transform neighborhoods and people's lives."

A significant portion of Project EverGreen's funding comes from within the green industry, though the nonprofit is reaching out to corporate partners and grant-awarding foundations outside of the industry for help.

Recent success stories include the makeover of Pingree Park, an 18-acre

neighborhood park in Detroit, where Project EverGreen was able to partner with Quicken Loans, leaders in the city's auto industry, and other Detroit-based businesses and foundations to bring new life into a community green space that had fallen into disrepair.

"When we first went there and toured this park, it was a ghost town. You didn't see anybody outside. It was sad to see it overgrown and vacant," Code says.

After roughly three years of renovation there, Code now counts many of the nearby residents as friends. "Today, when you go to the park, you see people playing, you see strollers and dogs and kids running around laughing," she says. "One of the residents told us she had missed the laughter of kids in the park, and now that laughter has come back."

Project EverGreen's work to provide complimentary lawn care for active duty military families began in 2006 thanks to partner lawn care companies across the nation. Through its online database, Project EverGreen is able to match volunteers with those needing their services.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, many GreenCare for Troops volunteers expanded their scope to also provide free lawn care to frontline health care employees.

"We're able to help take one thing off of their to-do list," Code says. "But it's also about providing peace and serenity and relaxation to these families. If you have a busy, stressed day, you can go sit in your backyard and feel that calm that comes from the gift of green space."

A voice for the industry

As a leading voice and ambassador for the lawn and landscape industry for more than three decades, Code has played a key role in shaping what it is today.

"Cindy Code has devoted her career to promoting the green industry," says Phil Fogarty, a Weed Man sub-franchisor in Ohio, Western Pennsylvania and New York who also serves as an advisory council member with Project EverGreen. "Her work as a journalist, editor and publisher went way beyond covering a story or reporting on a trend. Cindy finds ways to connect the entrepreneurs of this industry while shining a bright light on the best of what we do and how we do it," says Fogarty, who is also a 1999 Leadership award winner.

Code's editorial talents earned GIE Media "dozens of national awards for editorial excellence and expanded our business influence beyond a business-to-business magazine by launching innovative print and digital products, including the first-ever website to serve the professional landscape industry, custom news apps and powerful face-to-face business events," Foster says.

Looking back on a career spent advocating for the industry, Code says she feels grateful for the many colleagues and friends she's met along the way.

"I've interviewed and become friends with so many of the people in this industry. I've seen the blood, sweat and tears they've put into their businesses," she says. "It has been empowering and a privilege to get to help them tell their stories." ●



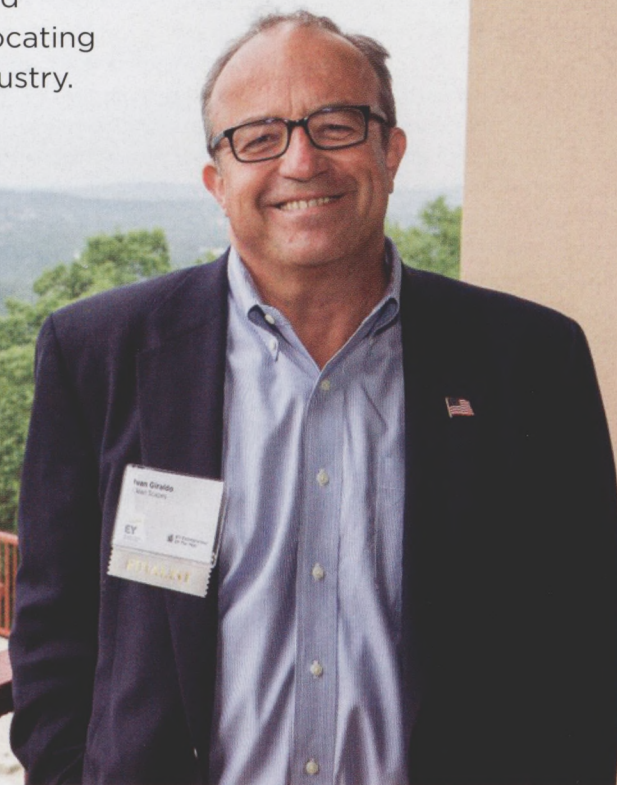
Alongside Project EverGreen, Cindy Code helps revamp green spaces for communities to enjoy.

The author is a freelancer based in Kentucky.

Leading by **EXAMPLE**

Ivan Giraldo guides Austin-based Clean Scapes to success while advocating for Hispanic-Americans in the industry.

By Robin Roenker



IN 1985, at age 22, Ivan Giraldo left his native Columbia to start a new life in Florida. Today, he is co-founder and president of Clean Scapes, a booming commercial landscape businesses based in Austin, Texas, which was ranked number 33 on the Lawn & Landscapes Top 100 list for 2020.

"It's been an enjoyable and a challenging ride," says Giraldo, who in 2017 was named the Central Texas Entrepreneur of the Year in the services category by EY (formerly Ernst & Young).

With branches in Austin, San Antonio and Dallas, Clean Scapes clients include many of the area's leading corporate office parks, retail centers, homeowners' associations and education and health care facilities.

Winner of multiple national and regional landscaping awards for its crews' meticulous care of properties – including the Texas state capitol, Dallas's Galatyn Commons office park, San Antonio's Blue Skies of Texas retirement community and more – Clean Scapes has risen to the top of its field by providing top-notch, customer-focused service.

"Ivan's story is amazing as to how he came to the

U.S. from Columbia, working completely from the bottom up to ownership in commercial landscaping," says David Weaver, senior property manager with Lincoln Property Company, a commercial property management company based in Austin. "He's a great leader and innovator and is well-known and respected by his friends, co-workers, employees and peers, and that has led to his success in building the pre-imminent landscaping company in our area."

Bringing Beauty to Communities

Early in his career, Giraldo worked with his brothers in their small, residential landscaping business in Florida.

"I have always been in love with the outdoors," Giraldo says. "Starting out, it was wonderful to see the difference that we were able to make in people's lawns, and the joy that we brought to them."

Later, after moving to Texas, Giraldo began work with CleanCut – working his way up from crew member to foreman and, eventually, supervisor. When CleanCut later merged with TruGreen, Giraldo became manager of one of the company's most successful branches.

In 2005, Giraldo founded Clean Scapes with Rex Gore, who had previously co-founded CleanCut. They started with just seven employees. Today, they employ more than 700, and their 2019 reported revenue topped \$55 million.

"Our industry is about bringing beauty to our communities," Giraldo says. "When you travel to a different part of our country and drive through it . . . you enjoy the beauty of the landscapes in that city. The parks and green spaces are inviting and peaceful. That's what we do – we bring that level of comfort and invitation to our communities. It's a benefit for everybody, and that's what makes me so happy and proud about the work that we do."

With more than 30 years in the industry – much of it in central Texas – Giraldo has developed a broad network of clients who have relied on him and his crews to keep their properties looking their best for decades. Many of the property managers he works with count him not just as a colleague or work partner, but as a friend.

"I have known Ivan for over 20 years now. During those 20 years he has always conducted his business dealings in a professional and courteous manner," says Donald Vaglica, senior property manager with Live Oak Real Estate Development, Brokerage & Services based in Austin. "His knowledge of the Austin landscape environment has been impeccable. The landscaping for many of the buildings that I have managed since they were constructed in the late 1990s was installed by crews that Ivan oversaw. His current landscape company is taking care of the landscaping at most of those same buildings today. In addition to being a great vendor source, I must also add that I have the pleasure of being able to call Ivan a friend."

Giving voice to Hispanic-Americans in the landscape industry

Giraldo has been an active member with the National Hispanic Landscape Alliance (NHLA), which formed in 2011 to recognize and advance the interests of the more than 500,000 Hispanic-Americans who

work in the landscape industry across the U.S. Earlier this year, NHLA opted to merge with the National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP), but the group's core work will continue.

Giraldo served as NHLA board secretary before the merger, and he's currently working with NHLA and NALP leadership to chart exactly how the two groups can best work together to continue to support the growing Hispanic community within the American landscape industry.

"Our industry is open and welcoming to everybody," he says. "But we can always be a little more inviting. There's always room for improvement. That was the purpose of NHLA in the beginning. We were hoping to be the voice of the Spanish and Latino population within the industry. We also wanted to help Anglo-owned companies to integrate their Latino workforce and promote them from frontline employees to management as a way of acknowledging their assets to the company."

Giraldo's own experience as a Hispanic-American who worked his way up in the industry – from frontline crew member to one of the country's top landscape business owners – gives him a unique perspective on the potential for managerial or entrepreneurial talent in every employee.

Perhaps that's why one of the hallmarks of his career has been the kindness and respect with which he leads his teams.

"Ivan and I met in the mid to late 1990s, when he was a crew leader," says Vera Massaro, vice president of Qualico Communities, based in Pflugerville, Texas. One thing that impressed me about Ivan was the way he handled his crews. I understand Spanish, so I knew what he was saying and how he was saying it, and he was always very professional with his guys that didn't understand any English. He never spoke down to them."

Massaro says the memory is made all the more clear because of experience she's had with other lawn care companies, in which crew leaders treated their team members with far less respect.

"I guarantee I could meet Ivan out

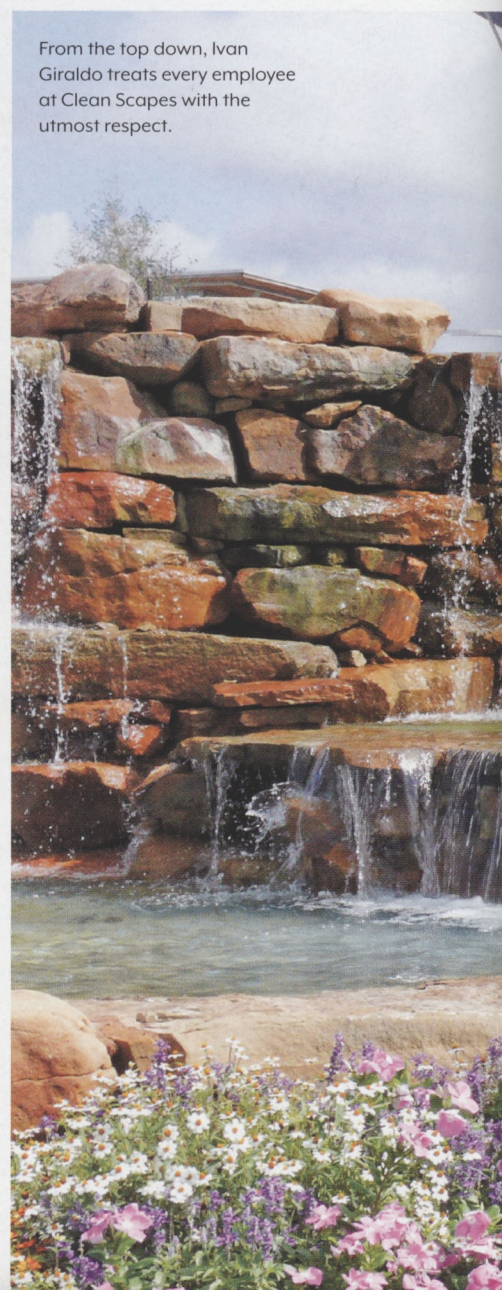
in the field right now, and he would be talking to the guy holding the shovel digging the ditch in that exact same (respectful) manner," she says. "I mean, I've seen it. He treats his clients that way, too."

Forging pride in the industry

While with the NHLA, Giraldo helped launch the group's "Proud to Be Green Colored" campaign to promote awareness and pride in the green industry's contributions to communities across the country.

"When people talk about jobs, it's

From the top down, Ivan Giraldo treats every employee at Clean Scapes with the utmost respect.



Our industry is about bringing beauty to our communities."

Ivan Giraldo, co-founder and president of Clean Scapes

always the concept of white-collar or blue-collar working people. One of the problems with our industry is that it doesn't have more of an identity as a very professional industry and a career in which to be proud," Giraldo says.

To combat that identity crisis, Giraldo and other NHLA members came up with the idea of the green collar campaign to give the industry increased visibility.

Giraldo hopes NALP will continue the campaign. "Hopefully we can continue and make everybody realize that we are

an important sector of our economy, and we are proud of that," he says.

Humble by nature, Giraldo hesitates to consider himself a "leader" within the green industry, though he admits he knows some people see him in that light – and he's happy to help mentor others whenever possible.

"I enjoy sharing my ideas and knowledge with others," he says. "I learned by listening to other people. I believe by sharing our experiences, that's how we get better."

Giraldo feels pleased, at this point in

his career, to have the opportunity to help others reach their own business goals within the industry. He takes great joy in encouraging others and coaching young leaders in the industry "every chance that I get," he says.

"You never know who you are affecting, with what you do or what you say, directly or indirectly," he says.

"You may say certain things in a group or in a meeting that can affect somebody in a positive way. That's what I love. I love to lead by example." ●





Guido, center, with David Meerman Scott, global online marketing strategist, and Lisa Foulger, leadership coach.

COMPETITIVE EDGE

There's a reason why colleagues call Judy Guido a force of nature as a strategist, businesswoman and industry advocate. **By Kristen Hampshire**

I love the ability to create something from scratch."

Judy Guido, founder
of Guido & Associates

JUDY GUIDO reflects on the quickest, highest-stake strategy session she ever engaged in – a life-or-death situation that allowed just one fleeting second to act.

"The whole world stopped, and everything went silent," she says of the scene in her sun-drenched kitchen the morning of July 5, 2017. "I knew the next move I made would determine whether I lived or died that day."

Guido, founder of Guido & Associates a business consulting firm in California, can handle major pressure and command a room.

At the same time, she has a bubbly personality and infectious way that begs a listen. Longtime friend and industry colleague Connie Hom, CEO of Buckingham Greenery, Buckingham, Va., says, "With those big eyes, she just sparkles."

Hom considers Guido a free spirit.

"When I say that, it's because she is unconventional in her thinking and pushes companies to think about the future and what trends might impact the industry so they can get ahead of that," Hom says.

In fact, Guido has grown a career out of positioning brands to compete. Back in 1998, she was one of four executives at LandCare USA that took the company public on the New York Stock Exchange.

After that, she was recruited by green industry legend and Valley Crest chairman Burt Sperber to be the marketing right-hand. She's an industry advocate, a champion for women, a self-described learnaholic and askaholic.

But she didn't expect to strategize a way to safely exit her home to save herself from an attacker with a pickax.

Reflecting on the near fatal injury, resulting in three violent digs to her head and brain surgery, she says:

"I made a very conscious decision that I was not going to die that day. And while healing, I realized I had two choices: I could look at this awful thing that happened and say, 'Why me?' Or, I could rise above it and say, 'I'm not going to let a psychopath take me and my family down. He is not going to take my life.' So that's what I decided and what I did."

A mind for strategy

Now, Guido is writing a book to document the horrific experience, and she's tentatively calling it, "Can I Pick Your Brain?"

One of her superpowers, she says, is a fast sense of humor. "In another life, I would have loved to be a stand-up comic," she says, explaining that the working book title is the first question people ask her as a strategic marketer and businesswoman.

And a "picking of the brain" literally happened in her own yard. Some would grimace, but Judy is not in the least bit bothered by her pun.

In fact, it marks the day of her recovery when she laughed for the first time – a gift. "That is my job," she says. "People always say to me, 'Hey, Jude, can I pick your brain?'"

Hom's not surprised at her friend's comedic, bright-side approach.

"You might be in a very serious conversation and she'll say something funny that takes you back a bit and puts you at ease," Hom says.

That's what Guido had to do to pacify a landscape worker who had a psychotic break on the job at her home. The morning of July 5, Guido took her daughter to summer day camp. She drove the half-

hour commute back home and sat down at her kitchen island with some coffee to catch up on email. The neighborhood was relatively quiet, though her own property was all action with a landscape crew on site.

"Next thing, I heard what I thought was an explosion," Guido says. Workers were in the back yard using pickaxes to remove sod so it could be replaced. "I thought they hit one of our gas lines, and it was so loud it blew the French doors open."

Guido ran to the window and saw one of the crew members dashing across the yard – he leaped over the fence. Another man on the team was chasing him with the pickax in hand.

She immediately called the owner of the company to let him know there was a fight on her property. As soon as she hung up the phone, the guy – who was the size of a football player – charged toward Guido's house and began bashing windows with the ax. Guido wondered if, because of the supposed gas line break, he was doing this to prevent her house from blowing up.

Then he entered her home.

"What is going on?" Guido asked, still considering that he was going to tell her about a gas line break. He looked her in



Guido, right, with friend and business partner, Susan Packard, center, founder of HGTV, and Raschely Flint, landscape designer with Plants Creative Landscapes.

the eye and said, evenly, "I tried to kill my coworker. He is the devil."

This is when the world stopped for a nanosecond. This was the pivotal moment when Guido's natural instinct to think strategically changed the trajectory.

Guido says, "I could not run to the front door and unlock it in time because he was two feet away from me. But I needed to for someone to hear me scream for my life."

She developed a strategy and acted.

"You look hurt," she told him. "Did you get harmed? You have blood on you. I have to help you. I need to get you to the doctor." She spoke this script like a mantra while slowly walking toward the killer, in hopes that her subtle advancing would prompt him to back up toward the door.

Once they made it to the path outside her home, his face took on an appearance that Guido describes as catatonic.

"Then, he scrunched up his face and got this, like, killer-like face and he looked at the dog. 'I have to kill him because he is the devil, too!'"

The family's 8-pound lapdog became a casualty, and Guido fled to the street — though he caught up, slit her throat and punctured her head three times with an ax.

Green STEAM

The attacker is in prison. Guido spent several days in the intensive care unit, followed by months of therapy. Her survival was a miracle, and trauma doctors remarked to her, "You are so normal! You don't need us anymore."

Guido's grit helped her push through recovery, and she was reconnecting with clients after about six weeks.

"Cognitively and strategically, this made me stronger," she says, adding that she experiences some issues with balance and headaches, but suffered no memory loss. "I would tell you I'm back 90% physically and I'm stronger mentally."

Guido is also back to what she does best.

"I love the ability to create something from scratch," she says, rehashing the experience of going public with LandCare USA. At the time, there wasn't available industry data to prove market opportunity,

which is what Wall Street cares about. Guido started digging. She called every state and national association, the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, and the list goes on.

"We worked with brilliant people to literally create a business model for LandCare that did not exist," she says. "We had to create a purpose and values that did not exist because we were blending different companies, and we had to create one brand, one culture, one voice, one team, one business model."

Guido had stayed in touch with some MBA colleagues, and they used to jab her about her choice to work in the green industry. They didn't understand the complexity due to variables like weather. On one call with the group, she asked, "How many people here have IPOed on Wall Street?"

No one.

"I was the one person who did, and what took me there? The green industry," says Guido, an advocate since she was first exposed to it. More than 20 years ago, Ed Laflamme, now of the Harvest Group, invited her to attend an Associated Landscape Contractors of America conference.

"If someone had told me, 'Judy, you are going to be in this industry and go to Wall Street. You are going to work with some of the most intelligence private equity groups and incredible engineers who are creating new products. You are going to do top-notch work with thought leaders.' I never would have thought this about the green industry — ever."

That said, landscaping and gardening were somewhat ingrained in her since she was a child. Guido grew up in a middle-class family in a seaside town in Connecticut called Milford.

One of five siblings, her father, Ray-

mond, often worked two jobs while her mother, Marie, managed the household.

Guido says her parents are personal heroes, and they were always interested in giving back to the community. She continues this in her own life. Over the years, Guido has spoken at countless conferences, and she guesses she's mentored about 120 green industry professionals.

This is a natural instinct for Guido, and a focus of her career today is on educating others about the STEAM aspect of landscaping and how it involves science, technology, engineering, art and math. She wants more women to know this, too.

"From individual companies to national associations, I continue to work with women to attract them and get them into the market to see the opportunity," says a woman who was often the only female in the room when she entered the industry.

"The industry has been very good to me," Guido says.

And today, she is very intentional about selecting projects, initiatives and partnerships. Life is never guaranteed, as she learned. She is not wasting a moment.

"I grow people. I grow companies. I make people better and smarter, and I make their bottom lines better and the operations more efficient. That is what I focus on, and if people aren't serious about doing that, then in the time I have left, it's just not a fit."

She also surrounds herself with friends and family.

"That's who it's really about," she says, expressing gratitude for an industry that has enriched her career and the people she has met along the way. "The people I surround myself in business are the same way — just wonderful human beings." ●

I grow people. I grow companies... and if people aren't serious about doing that, then in the time I have left, it's just not a fit."

Judy Guido, founder of Guido & Associates



Hitting **HOME RUNS**

Jim Hornung Jr. brings an affinity for business, a focus on technology and the natural ability to build lasting relationships to the family operation, Elbers Landscape.

By Kristen Hampshire

EAGERLY FOCUSED on the diamond and its animated players – tracking their batting averages, RBIs, home runs – young Jim Hornung Jr. rarely missed a game at Sahlen Field. Among a crowd of more than 20,000 Buffalo Bison AAA baseball fans, the elementary-aged son of the ballpark's head groundskeeper had a backstage pass in many ways. "I'd see 50, 60, 70 games a season and hang out on the field, watching batting practice and just being around the players," says Hornung, president of the family business his parents, Jim Hornung Sr. and wife Beth Ann, purchased in 1980.

Elbers Landscape Service was a way of life – and it certainly had plenty of perks. Baseball; hanging out with crews on landscape jobs; helping families select Christmas trees; watering plants in the garden center; riding along

while his dad plowed parking lots at night.

"My mother likes to tell me the story of how she would bundle me up in my snowsuit and dad would put me in the truck, which had vinyl seats," Hornung says. "We'd hit a pile of snow and I'd slide to the floor."

When remembering this, Hornung Sr. laughs. "He was working with me when he still had diapers on, and as he got older he moved on to landscaping, irrigation work and other things in the business."

As a toddler, Hornung bumped his way through the garden center in a wheelie with a tray on it. By the time he was in middle school, he began attending New York State Turfgrass Association (NYSTA) meetings with his dad. "He'd tag along on the trade show floor – and what surprised me early on was his maturity at a young age," says Mike Maffei, a golf course superintendent, fellow NYSTA board member and mentor to Hornung. "He was way above his years, and that really jumped out to me."

Hornung latched on to the business side of Elbers Landscape – a fit for his focused, organized and relationship-oriented char-

acter. "That is where he shines," Hornung Sr. says, calling his son a logical, fast thinker who is decisive and process driven.

From advancing the company's technology to elevating its snow division and carving a niche in the campus market, Hornung has grown the company wider and deeper during his tenure. Meanwhile, he acknowledges that everything about the business is different today in the wake of the pandemic. "I've been telling our staff, 'Forget about that business, forget about what we used to do. What this is about now is what we are going to do. What do we want to build now?'" he says.

The market is different. The work environment has changed. The in-house design center Elbers Landscape had nearly completed has never been booked with a meeting, and there no immediate plans to usher clients into the modern space for meetings.

Hornung sees what could be described as an unprecedented upset as a real opportunity.

"Save for the coronavirus, I don't know if we would have made a hard pivot to

redefine our business," he says. "What I'm most proud of is how we have grown and succeeded, signed up new customers and used this time as an opportunity to rethink where we are headed."

Earning stripes

COVID-19 has been the ultimate test of knowing your numbers, adapting to change and repositioning a business – but several milestone experiences leading up to the pandemic helped prepare Hornung and team.

There was the time following Superstorm Sandy, when Elbers Landscape was retained by the National Park Service to restore Miller Field on Staten Island. Following the hurricane, the space shifted from a hub of athletic activity with 15 soccer fields, cricket pitch courts and a beach into a Red Cross/FEMA emergency zone for locals. "In the process, the property was destroyed because it was wet, dirty and heavily damaged from trucks and trailers," Hornung describes.

The massive, former airfield was completely rebuilt by Elbers Landscape. The



Jim Hornung Jr. notes that Elbers Landscape is a family affair, and he raises his three daughters blocks away from the main office in Buffalo, New York.

He was working with me when he still had diapers on, and as he got older he moved on to landscaping, irrigation work and other things in the business.”

Jim Hornung Sr., owner of Elbers Landscape

project required several months of work, followed by a year of monitoring the land and another year of maintaining the fields. The company coordinated barges to cross the New York Harbor with equipment and materials. “It was tremendously challenging, logistically,” Hornung says.

At the time, his first child, Brooklyn, was a newborn and he stayed based at the Buffalo office to manage the business side of the project. His dad was in the field with crewmembers, stationed in New Jersey and on Staten Island. “There was the boat traffic, security demands, cost to cross the harbor and you had to deal with the time of day because if you missed the tide, you couldn’t dock,” Hornung explains. “One day, we got a bunch of equipment over there and we couldn’t get close enough to the dock to unload it because the tide went out.”

A year later, following the success of this project, the company was hired to restore the Statue of Liberty Arrival Mall, where Dutch elm trees were destroyed by salt water from the storm.

Another landmark project was prompted by a call two years ago from the Erie Seawolves, a minor league baseball team in Pennsylvania, a Double-A affiliate of the Detroit Tigers. Elbers Landscape had built the field twice previously, but it had fallen into disrepair. “We need you to come down to a meeting tomorrow, we have to redo the field,” the manager told Hornung.

It was August, nearing the end of the season at UPMC Park. “The Tigers were not happy with the condition of the field, and the Seawolves were concerned about losing their affiliation with the team if they didn’t improve it,” Hornung says.

The Elbers Landscape management team immediately drove to the site. It needed to be torn up and completely rebuilt in time for baseball the following spring 2018.

Basically, the Seawolves told Hornung, “design it, install it, make it happen,” he says.

Two weeks after the season closed, the crews bulldozed the field, laid new drainage and irrigation, brought in materials and oversaw the construction. The entire

project was completed in less than 12 weeks, and the entire Elbers Landscape team, including office staff, was recruited to assist. Crews worked seven days a week, finishing late under the field’s lights. “We knew we would push through to get it done,” Hornung says. “Now, it is recognized as an award-winning field, and that spoke to the quality of our team.”

The company has attracted more campus clients, including Hornung’s alma mater, Canisius College in Buffalo. The same goes for corporate accounts with expansive properties. “Because of Jim’s efforts, we have grown tremendously,” says Hornung Sr. “I took the business to a different level on the sports side, and Jim has taken it to a different level on the snow and campus side, and between the two of us, the landscaping has increased equally as much. We are not afraid to try something new.”

Strategic moves

The father-son duo is an ideal partnership if you ask either of them. “My dad is my No. 1 mentor and best friend,” Hornung Jr. says. “He is more detail oriented, and I’m more big picture. He is more easy-going than I am – I tend to be more intense. He is extremely methodical and has a unique way of planting the seed, so if I’m trying to plow forward, he might say, ‘Hang on. Let’s talk about this.’ I’m lucky to have him.”

Hornung Sr. says his son is a natural at building relationships, which has advanced the corporate and college campus side of the business.

“He turns his relationships into friendships,” he says.

When Hornung Jr. joined the company in 2004 after completing his business degree, he focused on sales and finance and noticed an opportunity when reviewing the company’s books.

“Historically, we landscaped all season and plowed a little bit of snow to keep key employees and the lights on, but when I started to look at that, I thought, ‘This doesn’t make a ton of sense,’” he says.

So, Hornung focused on growing snow. Now, it’s the largest division of Elbers

Landscape. Not to mention, the company has increased revenues consistently since he joined and there were about 10 full-time employees. Today, there are 40 team members on staff.

While serving on the NYSTA board, Hornung initiated a comprehensive strategic planning process. “He pushed to the board to think forward, and not just lay back and let the world go by,” Maffei says of the experience. “It was an eye-opener and the first time I had gone through the process. It was pretty much Jim’s idea from the start.”

Hornung explains how the board gathered feedback from vendors and members. “We wanted a diversity of thoughts and ideas,” he says. Ultimately, the planning was essential to position NYSTA in an evolving technological world of online learning and meeting. “It will help NYSTA sustain and guide future decision making.”

Aside from working on the business, Hornung is also involved in Hasek’s Heroes, which provides western New York children in need a hockey experience. “We give 1,000 kids per year an opportunity to play ice hockey, and it’s completely free,” he says.

Business does leak into home life — impossible not to when your wife and parents are involved. Hornung is married to Karen, and together they have three children: Brooklyn, 10; Reagan, 8; and Summer, 5. “You can’t do all of this without a good support system at home, and my wife is the best at that,” Hornung says.

The family lives a few blocks up the street from the Elbers Landscape office, and a couple blocks away from Beth Ann and Jim Hornung Sr. Hornung’s sister, her husband and three daughters also live in town. “When the six grandchildren get together, they’re pretty wild,” Hornung says.

Then again, business can be pretty wild, too. Though in spite of not knowing exactly what the future holds amid COVID-19, Hornung has the framework in place to adapt and continue growing.

“The way we used to do business is no longer a thing,” he says. Reverting to his business sense, he adds, “We are nimble and accurate because we know our numbers.” ●

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When it came to residential jobs, some landscaping companies actually saw an increase in business as homeowners have been spending more time on their properties, Kravitsky says.

"It is sad to say that COVID has been very good for our business. We have been the busiest we have ever been in the history of this company, which is 56 years old. It was a little scary in the beginning employee-wise, but ... when things settled down, our veteran guys came back to work and we have been gangbusters ever since," he says.

FOLLOWING THE RULES. Staffing issues were a challenge for Jenkins as well. Between employees having to quarantine, unemployment benefits dissuading new hires and social distancing guidelines complicating logistics, each day was full of uncertainties.



Grasshopper Lawns in Pennsylvania had its best year yet despite COVID-19.

"Mid-March came along and that's when everything is ramping up for the season, at least in our area. Then we got the stay-at-home order. What does that mean for us? Do we have to stop doing our landscaping?

Do we have to stop doing our pre-emergent and fertilizer? What does that actually look like? There was a lot of uncertainty in that," Jenkins says.

To comply with social distancing regula-



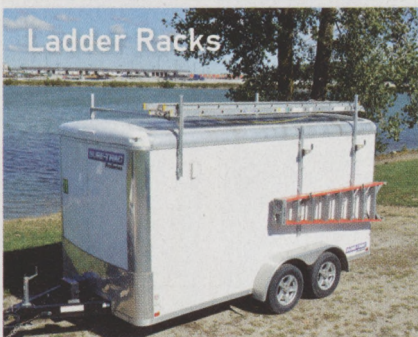
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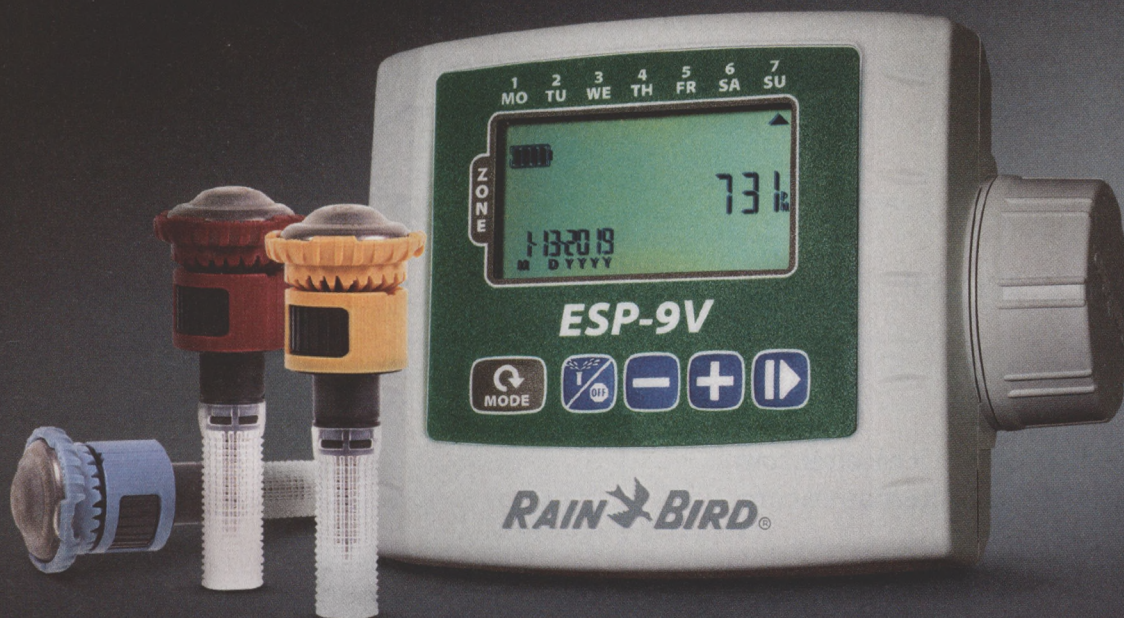


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MAINTENANCE

(Fuel costs) will definitely help the bottom line coming into the year. On average, we are saving close to \$15 a truck a day.”

NATHAN ROYSE, Royse Lawn Care

tions, Jenkins had to ask some employees to drive their personal vehicles behind the crew trucks.

“We couldn’t have three guys in a truck anymore. So, we did have to pay some mileage for that third crew member,” Jenkins says.

Despite those added mileage expenses, plus an addition of a crew this year, overall fuel spending still decreased significantly for Jenkins. The cost to fill their on-site fuel tanks got as low as \$1.25 a gallon at one point.

“We spend a significant amount in fuel, and when you multiply that out per gallon and the miles we drive, that would save us quite a bit,” she says.

While many companies like Jenkins Lawn Care opt to have on-site fuel tanks, Royse found that it was actually a cost savings to go back to using a gas station.

“At some points, we were paying 40 cents more per gallon to have it on site, plus there were no credit card rewards or cash back deals or anything like that. That’s probably the thing we do differently from other lawn care companies,” he says.

This year’s low fuel prices helped Royse’s bottom line as well. With trucks totaling 120 miles a day, and gas as low as 75 cents per gallon at one point, Royse saved about \$300 a month.

“It will definitely help the bottom line coming into the year,” he says. “On average, we are saving close to \$15 a truck a day. It’s huge.”

To further manage fuel expenses, Royse made it a goal to tighten routes this year by upgrading their routing software to the mobile live platform.

“We know where every truck is all the time,” he says. “When service calls or new sales calls come in, we can look from the office and see where trucks are and then add things to peoples’ routes. Routing software definitely makes a difference.”

Even for smaller companies with high route density, the savings added up. Brace Lawn Care in Massachusetts services about 100 weekly accounts predominantly located in large developments or on cul-de-sac, says owner Kevin Brace.

“Even though we are not traveling 30-40 minutes for each lawn, every little bit counts. So, when fuel prices go down, that’s a huge boost for us,” Brace says. “It’s all about time. If I know it takes six minutes to get from this lawn to that lawn, if there’s no traffic, it will take us six minutes. If it’s congested, those extra two minutes times say 25 lawns is an extra hour out of my day that we are losing productivity.” L&L

The author is a freelance writer based in Kentucky.



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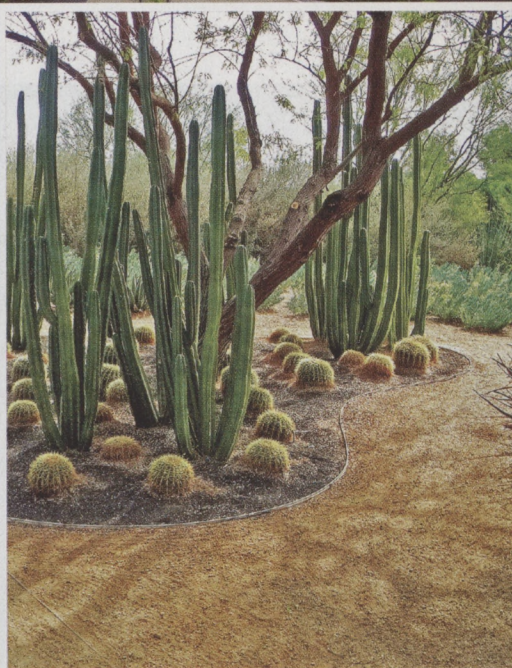
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THE RIGHT WAY TO WATER

Getting the most out of irrigation heads and nozzles takes a number of steps by the contractor.

By John Torsiello

Hopefully, no landscape professional tackles an irrigation system installation with the end result being unacceptable to the client. But alas, it does happen.

“We definitely encounter some installs where you just shake your head and wonder ‘who installed this’ and ‘what in the world they were thinking at the time,’” says Scott Dalton, Florida operations manager for Landscape USA. He cited common issues in such bungled jobs as nozzles with mismatched precipitation rates, and incorrect height spray heads for the type of turf or shrub area.

According to Dalton, if an installation contractor does not utilize flex pipe or swing joints, it can create long-term problems with breaks and repairs for the homeowner or client. Installing the incorrect heads or nozzles can lead to significant water usage or waste as well.

“Understanding the water supply is very critical; if it is regular potable water or is supplied by a municipality of a reclaimed system,” he says. As for irrigation maintenance, tilted heads, overspray, low heads, blocked heads, mixed heads and clogged nozzles are some common problems, along with wrong nozzle installation.

“Common sprinkler problems on rotors would be that they stop turning, the seals wear out, or the arcs come out of adjustment,” says Brian Vinchesi, president of Design Engineer Irrigation Consulting.

Vinchesi says landscape/irrigation professionals should “look for a good seal and a variety of fixed arc nozzles.” Some companies, he explains, have products with few fixed arcs, which forces the use of a certain type of nozzle. Those nozzles, although convenient, do not have the uniformity of fixed arc nozzles, nor do they match precipitate as well.

Clogged heads are another common problem with irrigation systems. “There are many reasons a nozzle or spray head gets clogged,” says Guillermo Rodriguez, a field supervisor for True Lawn Care. “If lateral lines aren’t flushed correctly during a repair, debris goes through the line and clogs the nozzles or spray heads. Another reason nozzles get clogged is from minerals in the water. Over time, too much salt and calcium in the water causes a buildup and clogs the nozzles. Using reclaimed water in the irrigation system can cause lots of problems, like algae buildup.”

Rodriguez says he frequently sees “unprofessional” landscapers installing the wrong nozzle or spray head.

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“If the system has the wrong nozzle or spray head... it wastes water.”

GUILLERMO RODRIGUEZ, True Lawn Care

“If the system has the wrong nozzle or spray head, it can cause overspray onto sidewalks and parking lots, or bad water coverage, and it wastes water,” he says. The sprinkler nozzle or head needed depends on the type of irrigation system being installed, the coverage being called for, and what is being watered. “If you need to irrigate a large area of turf, rotary sprinklers work best because it has a longer range in distance and can cover more,” he adds.

“Trouble can occur when head spacing requirements are not followed by installers,” says John Castanoli, owner of Central Lawn Sprinklers. “Most manufacturers recommend that heads be spaced at 50% diameter of throw, which means each head will have to spray up to the next head not the arc of the head.” Proper flushing of spray heads prior to nozzles being installed is imperative, he says.

Castanoli recommends that the last sprin-

kler head and fitting on the line not be installed until a full flush is performed through an open pipe prior to the installation of the head. After all heads are installed, and while water is flowing, install nozzles closest to the zone valve and “work your way to the end heads” “Don’t forget to install screens (just about all manufactures supply a screen with each nozzle),” he says.

Spray heads are generally available in a stationary shrub model, while pop-up heights come in 2, 3, 4, 6 and 12 inches, Castanoli says.

“If you are watering turf you need to choose a pop-up high enough not to be blocked by the grass height. For average turf heights we find 4 inches adequate. However, if you are using nozzles that have a trajectory below 20 degrees, you should use a 6-inch pop-up head.” Stationary spray heads for watering shrubs can be installed

above or below the ornamental plants.

Dalton says there are several advancements in irrigation systems, some of which include built-in check valves to prevent low head drainage and rotator/rotating nozzles to provide an even, slower watering rate.

Daniel Stagg, regional vice president South East for Landscapes USA, says each irrigation system “can be different from the next.”

The size of the job, areas being watered, water source volume and plant material affect the type of head and nozzle that should be used.

“There are some really good rotating nozzles that help cover larger areas,” he says. “Smaller areas where reduced runoff and over spray need to be provided for can be accomplished by using correct nozzles and spacing.” **L&L**

The author is a freelancer based in Connecticut.

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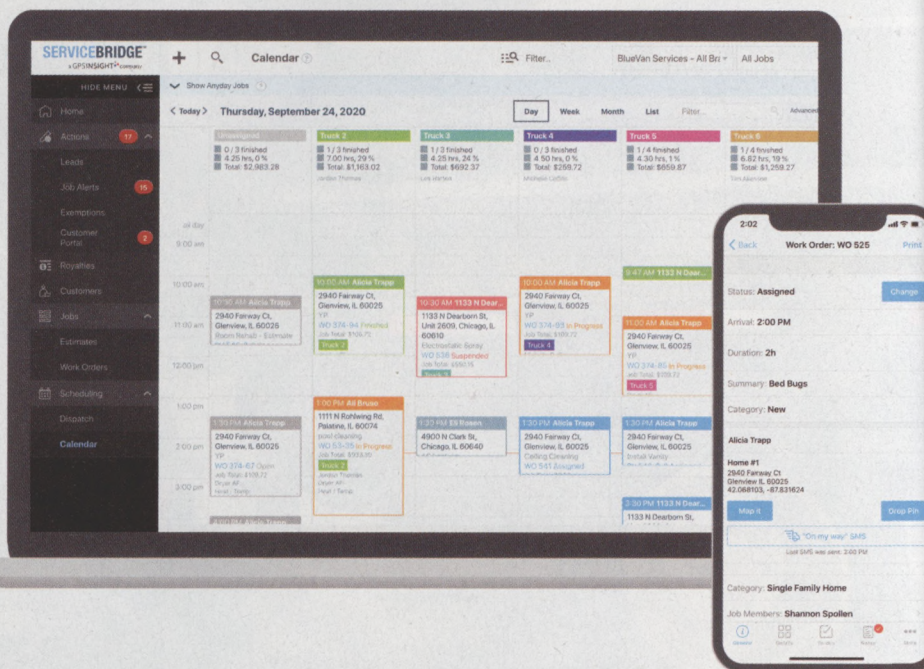
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The pitch: GPS Insight field service management software supports your business's daily workflow while eliminating paper, automating processes, connecting your crews to the office and ensuring a smooth customer journey.

- Dispatchers and team managers can see their crew's schedules at a glance with a customizable calendar view and dynamic dispatching
- Work order management allows you to create, view and manage what needs to be done at each job
- Combine field service management and GPS tracking for complete visibility into your daily operations

For more info: gpsinsight.com





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For more information about Routing Assistant visit RealGreen.com/Routing or give us a call at 877-252-9929.



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JUNIPER SYSTEMS GEODE GNS2 SUB-METER

The pitch: This new release of the Geode now features connectivity with a range of iPhone and iPad devices providing users with an even more versatile and powerful tool. This is made possible by the Geode's new MFi certification. MFi stands for Made For iPhone, iPad.

- The Geode GNS2 retains all the features and connectivity of the original Geode while adding this support for iPhone and iPad
- The Geode is an all-in-one sub-meter receiver that provides users with real-time, precision GNSS data
- Designed with versatility in mind, it features one-button simplicity and can be used with any of Juniper Systems' handhelds, as well as a wide range of Windows, Windows Mobile, Android and now iPhone and iPad devices – a feature used particularly for bring-your-own-device workplaces

For more info: junipersys.com



LYTX FLEET TRACKING

The pitch: Optimize fleet productivity and respond quickly to meet customer needs with Lytx Fleet Tracking Service, enhanced with video.

- Manage and track assets in the field with integrated video
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For more info: Lytx.com

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Kristen Fefes



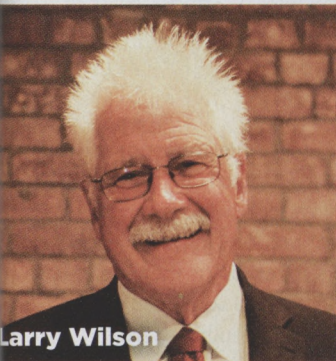
Warren Gorowitz



Paul Fields



Zach Johnson



Larry Wilson



Maria Candler



Bruce Wilson



Martha Hill



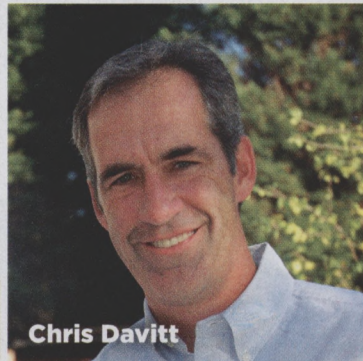
Jesus "Chuy" Medrano



Richard Restuccia



Kelly Dowell



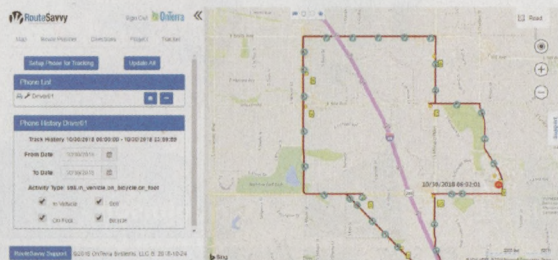
Chris Davitt

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

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

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

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ROUTESAVVY GPS FLEET TRACKER

The pitch: RouteSavvy GPS Fleet Tracker is innovative, affordable GPS tracking by using a smartphone.

- Compare planned routes vs actual and you can turn GPS tracking on or off for user privacy
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- Costs around \$4 per driver/month and has Android and iOS native apps for GPS tracking

For more info: Routesavvy.com



WORKWAVE ROUTE MANAGER

The pitch: WorkWave Route Manager's new user interface that combines the power of route planning and GPS tracking all into one screen.

- Gain real-time insight on-demand with Navigo: Navigo is WorkWave Route Manager's new menu tool that holds all information in one place, on one screen, and allows users to replan as they see fit
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For more info: Workwave.com

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FROM LEFT: Jesse Catron, Senior Vice President; Phil Catron, Founder and President; Theresa Smith, Senior Vice President



The Way

THE LEADER IN ORGANIC-BASED LAWN CARE®

With projected growth of over 10% in 2020, NaturaLawn of America continues to be a powerhouse in the green industry.





Is NaturaLawn® of America for Me?

NaturaLawn® of America is the only national lawn care company of its kind. Since 1987, we've been offering an alternative to harsh chemicals and pesticides through our proprietary, natural and organic-based fertilizers and biological controls. By providing customers with a safer, environmentally friendly and responsible lawn care experience, our franchisees have a distinct competitive advantage over other traditional lawn care companies.

Why NaturaLawn® of America?

- NaturaLawn® of America is a business system designed to gather customers and keep them. Our system has been tested time and again throughout the U.S. Your hard earned money will not be spent needlessly experimenting with what works and what does not-that has already been done. With our help, you simply grow your business.
- Franchising is all about reducing risk. You will not have to guess about the most effective ways to market and grow your franchise. We have developed the methodology for you to use, increasing the likelihood of success.
- With hard work and persistence, you will grow a business that thrives on recurring revenue from satisfied customers. Each year you will start with an established revenue stream from your existing customer base. Then, new customers will be added to your base yearly. Recurring revenue is the secret to those who are serious about building a secure future.
- NaturaLawn® of America lawn care is only the beginning of the opportunities our franchise system has to offer. After establishing your lawn care business, you can grow into two more business ownership programs, Mosquito Ranger® and Tick Ranger®, offering you the ability to increase recurring revenues.

Our proprietary lawn care products have received national attention from Entrepreneur, Military Times, Lawn & Landscape, various universities, our Federal Government, and numerous businesses and institutions. The awareness of the harm caused by traditional lawn care practices continues to grow. NaturaLawn® of America, along with the increasing concern to protect our environment, provides you the opportunity to offer solutions to real problems.

Due to the seasonality of the business, timetables become very important when opening a NaturaLawn® of America franchise. If our business appeals to you, I encourage you to respond promptly to learn more about this opportunity. I welcome your questions and am here to be of service to you-please call or email me today!

Blaine R. Young

VP of Franchise & Business Development, NaturaLawn® of America

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The NaturLawn Way

With projected growth of over 10% in 2020, NaturLawn of America continues to be a powerhouse in the green industry.

All indications show NaturLawn of America is poised for a positive 2020 fiscal year as the company has now awarded two additional franchise licenses so far; one in Mississippi and one in New Hampshire. Sales revenue is estimated to exceed \$80 million. In this special supplement, you'll learn more about a handful of the many successful franchisees at the company, along with the growth some have seen with the company's Mosquito Ranger and Tick Ranger brands.

Jay Belt, Finksburg, MD.

Revenue: \$12 million

Customers: 15,000

Employees: 80

Services: Lawn care, aeration & seed, flea & tick control, mosquito control

Years as franchisees: 30 years

Territories: 9 licenses – 4 locations

They were in the market to buy a lawn care business, and Jay Belt and his then partner knew who to contact for some help.

They reached out to NaturaLawn founder Phil Catron, who Belt knew from working in the same area, to help them make a purchase. But Catron would eventually have a better idea for them. This was the mid-1980s, and Catron had not started NaturaLawn just yet. While the duo eventually bought a business, a couple years later they found their way to Catron's creation.

"I knew he was a straight shooter and I saw how he worked," Belt says. "I understood that he knew a lot about business and lawn care. I trusted him because he was always honest and told it like it was."

More than three decades later, Belt is still part of the NaturaLawn family. He says



the ability to interact with other franchisees is a major plus to being part of the organization.

"You can bounce things off other owners," he says. "You can rely on

the expertise of the franchisor. With other franchisees, you can network with them and talk and try different things."

NaturaLawn is known for its pet- and family-friendly applications because of their organic based products, which Belt says customers appreciate. "People are always looking for safety," he says.

"They don't want their families and pets exposed to materials they don't trust. We go at it as if it was our own property." The family- and pet-friendly approach is indicative to NaturaLawn's overall approach to treating a lawn. The technicians have a strong relationship with the lawn in that they want to know about every aspect of it from the root and soil, to how it looks to the neighbors.

"We use the safest materials, and

our approach is working with the soil – coming up with a solution instead of treating symptoms," he says. "We focus on growing the root system up. It's not just throwing stuff on the lawn to make it green and temporarily look good."

Part of those safer materials is NaturaLawn's custom made fertilizer. The product gives franchisees advantages the competition just doesn't have.

"There are numerous aspects of our products which help build the soil – a proprietary blend of microbes that really helps the soil stay healthy and fight the pathogens in the soil," he says. "You can't make every lawn look perfect but if you get the soil right you can reach the best potential a lawn is going to have."

As far as a future for Belt, he's already succession planning for his son to take over. Having NaturaLawn's system in place and operating smoothly gives him peace of mind that the business will continue to thrive. Plus, he admits, "my son is a lot smarter than me," he says with a laugh.

"We have a succession plan and a bunch of great people working for us," he says. "They enjoy being with the franchise because they also see opportunities not just within our group but with other operations if they are willing to relocate"

Jon Bennett, Scranton, PA.

Revenue: \$135,000

Customers: 250

Employees: 3

Services: Lawn care, flea & tick control, aeration & seeding

Years as franchisees: 2 years

Territories: 1 license

As a self-proclaimed new kid on the block, Jon Bennett says even small franchises can find success in the NaturaLawn model.

He's only got one full-time technician and one person working in the office, plus himself, though Bennett says he plans on hiring someone new every year to keep growing the company. He comes from



14 years in the golf course management industry. He ultimately decided he needed more work-life balance and felt starting the franchise with NaturaLawn could

provide the answer. As somebody who had just started a young family, the safer organics-based products also attracted him to NaturaLawn.

"I looked at doing (lawn care) myself, but why reinvent the wheel. The company as a whole has great morals, ethics

and background. They're there for the environment, they're there for the customers," he says.

Bennett says many franchises will ask for high fees just to slap their name and branding on a truck or building. "There are a lot of them that will take \$50,000 from you. You get the name, and then you're kind of on your own," he says. "If that were the case, then I would have done it on my own."

He also really liked the complete package NaturaLawn has to help provide for clients. Many customers have told Bennett they didn't know a company even existed that offered flea and tick control plus lawn care fertilization, all while maintaining these services with organic, environmentally safe products.

They also anticipated the prices to be too high for them to actually sign on, but Bennett says the affordability and safety is a huge selling point with his customers.

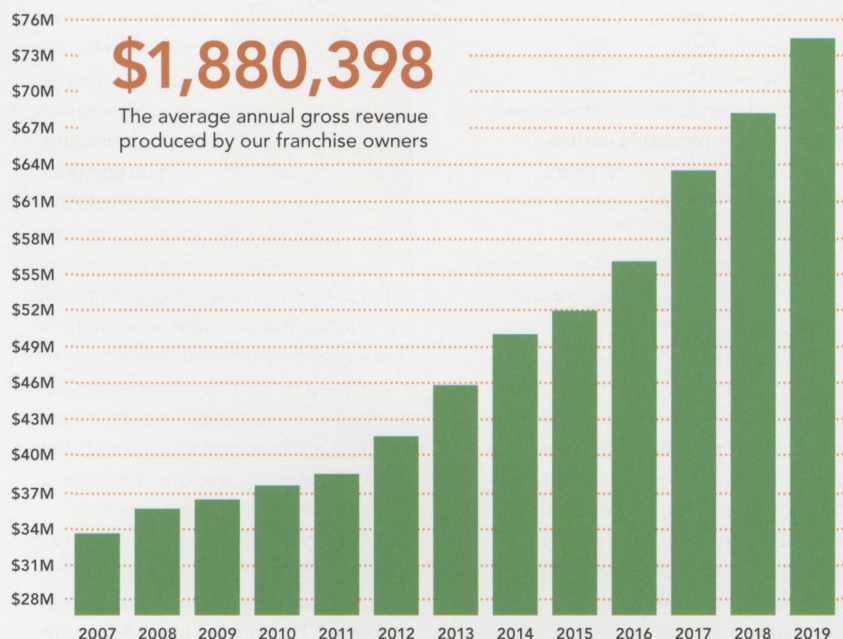
"People are more open to seeing what's going on with disease and pests," he says. "I find a lot of people are coming to us because that (business) has actually been shockingly busy despite the pandemic."

Bennett says he feels NaturaLawn provides hands-on help to new franchises learning how to adapt their models. When he had issues figuring out accounting, they flew someone in to help.

He says it's not just because somebody was already nearby – he believes the help would be offered to anyone.

"It wouldn't matter if I was in California, they would've sent someone out," he says. "Not many people do that. With NaturaLawn, you're not just thrown to the wolves."

NaturaLawn® of America Revenue Growth



Rod Criegio, Minneapolis, MN.

Revenue: \$1.7 million

Customers: 3,600

Employees: 21

Services: Lawn care, aerating & seeding, flea & tick control, mosquito control

Years as franchisees: 19 years

Territories: 3 licenses

Almost two decades ago, Rod Criegio determined he wanted to end up working with a franchise. It was an easy choice to stick with NaturaLawn, he says, because of the support he got once he signed on.

First, they flew him out to Baltimore for several days of training with the corporate team.

It was here they went over hiring, financials and even the basics of agronomics that he needed to understand to be successful. Criegio says you can't learn all of this in one sitting, which is



why NaturaLawn offers annual meetings with all the owners that take on educational elements, plus regional meetings during the year at various locations.

What's more, NaturaLawn will also send representatives out to visit the franchises, especially when they need some form of tech support. When he first started, they sent out a regional manager to Criegio's office to get him going in the right direction.

"They seemed like they had a really sound education system in place to help me understand what I needed to do to get me where I wanted to go," he says.

"That just gave me a higher level of confidence. I knew grass was green and

that was about it. I quickly learned there was a lot more to lawn care than that."

Criegio says NaturaLawn provides a solid blueprint to ensure everyone's on the same page. Due to some of the customer service tips NaturaLawn offered, Criegio says his customer retention remains high despite COVID-19.

"We need to make sure we have really good relationships with our customers," he says. "A lot of that is trained by the Home Office, but a lot of that comes from individual owners as well."

Criegio is also a huge supporter of mosquito services, as he jokes that the pests are known as "Minnesota's state bird." He's even had some clients adopt all of his services once they see how well the mosquito products work.

"Once again, you get into the safety component where we're trying to do our applications using only natural products," Criegio says.

"We get the results and we're doing it in a safer manner."

Roy Good, Frederick, MD.

Revenue: \$1 million

Customers: 1,550

Employees: 12

Services: Lawn care, aeration & seeding, flea & tick control, mosquito control

Years as a franchisee: 30 years

Territories: 1 license

Roy Good and NaturaLawn President and Founder Phil Catron go back decades.

"I've been in the industry since 1976," he says. "I started with ChemLawn in Atlanta, Georgia, and then got transferred up to this area. Phil Catron was my regional agronomist here on the east coast with ChemLawn. Then in 1991, I bought a franchise to be a part of NaturaLawn of America."

Good says it was Catron's expertise, and his emphasis on customer service, that led him to join the franchise.

"Phil's ability to build strong relationships, based on sound principles, has made a difference," he says. "We can get



lost in all the fertilizers and the special stuff and sometimes people don't want that; people want relationships."

Good says that has led his business to be extra respon-

sive and accountable with their customers.

"They want service," he says of his customers. "They want to be taken care of. That's our standard. We're waiting the table so to speak. The best waitress is the one who recognizes you and looks in your eyes and has good, warm personable skills."

Good equates good customer service to going to an ice cream parlor. Some places will just give you one scoop of ice cream on your cone, while others will pack one scoop down and then add another on top.

"Always give the two scoops," Good says.

Having candid conversations with customers about what they can do on

their end to improve their lawn is also key, according to Good.

"The way we approach lawn care is by talking about health and vigor," he says. "We talk about mowing right and doing the things the plant likes...and not leading with chemicals. It's that approach of starting with the easy things we can do."

The natural elements of Tick Ranger and Mosquito Ranger are also popular among Good's customers.

"It's like a whole new revenue stream that can be developed naturally," he says of the products. "Nobody else is doing it and the stuff we're using really works. If I can offer you something that's safer for you, your pets, your family and the environment, you'd be interested obviously."

Good says he looks forward to a nice, long future with NaturaLawn.

"The beauty of all this is that we have the best fertilizers, we have a great approach, and we are using less pesticides. These are exciting times and I've been doing this forever," he says. "The beauty of the industry is that I can do it for another 20 years."

Bruce Granger, Houston, TX.

Revenue: \$675,000

Customers: 1,100

Employees: 5

Services: Lawn care, aeration, tree & shrub, fire ant control, flea & tick control

Years as franchisees: 14 years

Territories: 2 licenses

While living in Virginia in 1996, Bruce Granger realized his lawn didn't look nearly as green as his neighbor's. When he asked them how they kept their lawns looking so nice, they pointed him toward NaturaLawn. Granger ended up not only becoming a client – he became a franchisee, but it took a decade.

In 2006, Granger's wife, Lynn, accepted a new job in Texas and he was along



for the ride until he figured out precisely what his next career step would be. Having always been impressed by NaturaLawn, he decided to

become a franchisee. "When I found out NaturaLawn was a franchise, I had been a customer of them and I knew it was an excellent product," Granger says. "And as far as the initial investment, it was very reasonable."

The quality of the product initially drew him in, but it was the idea of selling organics that sealed the deal. Of course, back in the mid-2000s, customers weren't

as concerned with being environmentally friendly as they are today. This was a surprise for Granger since he had come from the East Coast where they had just passed the Chesapeake Bay Act. "One client had even said at one point, 'I don't care what you put in my lawn as long as it's green.'"

It was particularly difficult to manage this because Granger says he was the first NaturaLawn franchisee in Texas. Each region of the country is unique, and once he shared some of his concerns with NaturaLawn, he says their support helped him through a rocky start. Though clients were initially skeptical of organics, Granger says it's become a "feather in my cap."

"By about 2012, the calls were coming in saying they saw us on the Internet, saw we have organics, and they have pets and family and they want it to be safer," he says.

Jim Laramée, North Attleboro, MA.

Revenue: \$8.5 million

Customers: 11,200

Employee number: 85

Services: Lawn care, aeration & seeding, flea & tick control, mosquito control

Years as a franchisee: 28 years

Territories: 8 licenses – 2 locations

Even during the early 2000s economic downturn, Jim Laramée's NaturaLawn franchise was humming and it was about to get better.

NaturaLawn was adding mosquito and tick control to its portfolio. Mosquito Ranger and Tick Ranger would provide franchisees the opportunity to branch out and help its current customer base as well as attract new clients.



"We were able to cross sell our current customer base, but we're also able to sell lawn care to people who were inquiring about mosquito," he says. "They didn't even know

they wanted lawn care until they called us for our mosquito control program."

As far as the success with his lawn care service, Laramée points to the systems NaturaLawn has in place. Those systems were especially helpful when he started out in the early 1990s.

"Going from zero customers to 500, they

supported us all the way through that," he says. "Helping us hit benchmarks and set reasonable expectations was really beneficial for us."

Laramée also recalls the sales training they received and one key piece of advice he pulled from it was "to listen."

"Listening to what the potential customer is asking for and what their current problems are, repeating back to them what they've said and then what your approach will be to fix it," he says, "was a really big learning tool for me. I still do that nowadays."

"We feel that that's one big difference between us and the other companies; actually just listening to the customer, especially on phone sales. If you're not face-to-face communicating with somebody, then repeating back to them what they've said to you is very important."

Michael Weiner, Pittsburgh, PA.

Revenue: \$1.5 million

Customers: 2,500

Employees: 13

Services: Lawn care, aeration & seeding, flea & tick control

Years as a franchisee: 13

Territories: 1 license

When Mike Weiner first joined the NaturaLawn franchise in 2007, he knew nothing about the green industry.

"I was a retail manager before, and I was looking for a way to be my own boss and be outside and have a business that would last and grow," he says. "That's one of the reasons why I chose the franchise. I



had a lot more help learning."

Weiner says all the support from the franchise's Home Office, and other franchisees, aided him in getting his business

off the ground.

"When I was investigating franchises, one of the things I was looking for was support," he says. "It was fantastic having that support. If I have an agronomic question, we have several in-house agronomists. If I have an accounting question, I go to the accounting

department. For marketing, I don't have to devise my own marketing plan."

Even though he didn't come from the industry originally, Weiner knew a thing or two about customer service – something he says helps his business stand out.

"The franchise is very strong about customer service," he says. "I do think we have some of the best, if not the best, customer service in the area. I often tell my guys that results are certainly important, but customer service is even more important."

In addition to having great customer service, Weiner adds NaturaLawn's proprietary products also give them an edge.

"Our products stand above and beyond what the other companies are doing," he says. "We always say that every single pellet that comes out of the bag does something for the lawn."

Weiner adds that NaturaLawn's Tick Ranger products have also been a god-send to his customers.

"Western Pennsylvania has one of the highest instances of Lyme Disease in the country," he says. "The customers love that it's all-natural. They have the peace of mind that it's perfectly safe."

Every business has administration and support related costs. In a company, this usually runs between 12% - 15% of the business' revenue. As a NaturaLawn franchise, one of the benefits you receive is administrative help and support from the home office, and at a cost significantly less than 12% - 15% of sales.

Rick Yates, Wilmington, DE.

Revenue: \$2.5 million

Customers: 3,800

Employees: 28

Services: Lawn care, aeration & seeding, flea & tick control, mosquito control

Years as a franchisee: 30 years

Territories: 2 licenses

Rick Yates has been with NaturaLawn since the beginning. "I'm one of the old guys," he says. "I'm one of the ones that started with the company. It was a brand-new franchise when we bought in." He says being a part of the company has been a fun journey. "We've grown tremendously over the 30 years," he says. "There's a lot of comradery among owners and that's really helpful. It's really helped us become the successful operation we are



today." Yates was also instrumental in helping establish the company's Mosquito Ranger program. He said the process started about 18 years ago. "People were asking 'is there something

we can do about mosquitoes'...we originally just started spraying garlic and a mixture of other oils to treat," he says. "About 10 years ago, we started playing around with our formula and it was like being in a chemistry lab. We now have a proprietary formulation that is 100% all-natural and extremely effective. The program has grown exponentially the last three years. We're absolutely delighted with this

product and the program," Yates says that using less pesticides has always been a goal of NaturaLawn's.

"When we first started, we were very unique in that we were the only company with natural and organic-based products for treating lawns," he says. "I remember when I started in this industry, people in the industry would put down pesticides based on the time of year whether they were needed or not. What makes us unique is the fact that we've reduced the use of pesticides significantly compared to our competitors."

With the coronavirus keeping people at home more, Yates says having kid- and pet-friendly products is even more crucial.

"Their yards have become more important to them than they ever have been before," he says. "The fact that we use products that are safer for children and pets is really important to consumers who see their kids out there every day."

John Vollmer, Danbury, CT.

Revenue: \$8.5 million

Customers: 11,000

Employees: 60

Services: Lawn care, aeration & seeding, flea & tick control, mosquito control

Years as a franchisee: 21

Territories: 5 licenses – 2 locations

Not having to unnecessarily handle chemicals was at the top of his priority list when John Vollmer was looking for a lawn care franchise to join. He had come from a commercial landscaping business, and as he was looking through an industry publication one night he saw a NaturaLawn ad and decided to give them a call.

Vollmer says that he made the right decision in choosing NaturaLawn.

"It's been very good," he says of the experience. "You always have your ups and downs, but most of it has been better than I expected. I know other people who've gotten into other lawn care franchises and their businesses are still very small. I didn't



get into this to be a small business."

What Vollmer was looking for in a franchise aligned with what founder, Phil Catron, had instilled in the business from the

beginning. "He's always laser-focused and anything that we do has to fit into the model of being safer for families, safer for our technicians and safer for the environment," he says. "There's nothing behind the scenes and I really like the transparency that Phil gives to the business."

Vollmer says his customers too like that he's a part of the franchise. "Customers like when you're a part of something larger, but on the other hand, not a conglomerate" he says.

"Every franchise is individually owned and operated but we have the support of the entire franchise system."

Vollmer says it's that blend of support

and individuality that allows franchisees to prosper.

"One thing this franchise does very well is that it never makes the decisions for you, but always gives you the tools to make the decisions and also supports your decisions," he says.

In his experience, Vollmer says customers have also mentioned that NaturaLawn is ahead of the competition in terms of using a more natural approach.

"The brand supersedes other brands due to the fact that we're looking forward as others are lagging behind," he says. "The way we talk, the way we do things, you can tell when speaking with customers who've been with other companies that this isn't what they're used to."

He mentions that they soil test every lawn in order to get a road map for how to best treat it.

"Customers are always focused on killing crabgrass, killing weeds and killing insects," he says. "They're not focused enough on the overall health of the lawn. So, we build a solid lawn and then we greatly reduce the use of those types of products."



ATTENTION DESIGN/BUILD CONTRACTORS!

Lawn & Landscape is looking for companies in the industry to submit the best work they've done. We'll feature some of the best submissions we receive in future issues of the magazine. All we need are a few high resolution photos (preferably before and after) along with some information on why you are submitting this project. We're open to taking a wide range of jobs – pools, patios, driveways, rain gardens, xeriscapes, etc.

HOW TO ENTER:

Send two to three high resolution photos (7X5 or bigger at 300 DPI) and 300-400 words describing your project with details like: Why you chose to submit it, challenges on the project and how you overcame them, how long the project took, etc.

Please email submissions or any questions to Editor Brian Horn at bhorn@gie.net.

Q&A WITH THE EXPERT



Q&A WITH AARON HATHAWAY

Technical Services Manager, Turf & Ornamental, Nufarm

1 How does your product save time?

A mixture of Cheetah® Pro + SureGuard SC® can be applied as directed sprays around desirable plants in landscape beds and can be broadcast-applied in areas where bare ground is desired. This combination saves time for applicators looking to control weeds that are already present and control weeds that are waiting in the soil as seed. One application provides control now and can provide months of control later.

2 How does your product save labor?

Cheetah Pro + SureGuard SC provides synergistic control, which means the combination works better than the addition of each one applied on their own. Cheetah Pro is a non-selective, post-emergence herbicide controlling grasses, broadleaves, and sedges and SureGuard SC, although its main function is residual weed control, also helps out with control of weeds that are present at application. These herbicides team up with two different modes of action to knock out weeds that have already emerged and SureGuard SC remains as a barrier in the soil to guard against later intruders. This increase in efficacy improves customer satisfaction and prevents callbacks.

3 How does your product save materials or fuel?

One application of Cheetah Pro + SureGuard SC can provide knockdown and residual control of weeds for more

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24 DAT | Treated May 21, 2019 | Dr. Aaron Hathaway

than four months. Return trips to control reemerged and/or newly germinated weeds in bare ground areas and landscape beds not only increase costs for materials but also fuel and labor. It is a great advantage to allow herbicides with residual to do so much of the work for you even after you leave the site.

4 How do your products help generate additional revenue for landscape and lawn care companies?

Having a plan of attack for weed control versus reacting to weed encroachment is paramount. A great program for weed control in landscape beds/bare ground areas is a spring-timed and a fall-timed application of Cheetah Pro + SureGuard SC – these timings address summer and winter annual weeds that show up like clockwork with POST and PRE control. Applying this combination at the shoulders of the season can provide season-long control of weeds and free-up time to

cover other sites and/or sell more services. A sound plan for weed control helps applicators keep customers from year to year because weeds will rarely be seen.

5 In what other ways do your products make landscape and lawn care companies profitable?

Cheetah Pro + SureGuard SC provides fast control of weeds – injury is prominent within two or three days and the weeds are burned down soon after. As expectations from customers increase, Cheetah Pro + SureGuard SC doesn't take its time controlling weeds, but provides fast, effective control of weeds that are present so that customers aren't staring at them for weeks after application. This, again, can reduce callbacks and simply increase the level of satisfaction among customers who want to see the effects of the service they paid for. We at Nufarm understand that expectations continue to increase and have worked hard to provide solutions that go the extra mile.

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**Q&A
WITH THE
EXPERT**


Q&A WITH RICK FLETCHER

Technical Services Manager, Turf & Ornamental, Nufarm

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Dave Gardner, The Ohio State University, 2017 | Sure Power® 32 fl oz/A | 1 application on July 25

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2 How does your product save labor?

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3 How does your product save materials or fuel?

One element that Sure Power adds is flexibility due to rapid penetration, leaf uptake and translocation in the plant. Not only is it designed for rapid entry into even the most waxy leaf surfaces, it is rainfast after one hour and mowing can occur within a day of the application.

4 How do your products help generate additional revenue for landscape and lawn companies?

We understand that a product that works is key to adding value to lawn and landscape operations. This means a product that is easy to use, highly efficacious, and supports a strong weed resistance program with an improved solution for grass, broadleaf and sedge weed issues. Sure Power checks all the boxes to support your bottom line.

5 In what other ways does your product make landscape and lawn companies profitable?

Sure Power is showing its power in ongoing trials, rapidly controlling wild violet, ground ivy and other weeds better than the competition. Nufarm encourages lawn and landscape customers to learn more about Sure Power at [Nufarm.com/USTurf/SurePower](https://www.nufarm.com/USTurf/SurePower), and to take advantage of significant early order savings on Sure Power and more than 35 additional proven Nufarm products at [NufarmRewards.com](https://www.nufarm.com/NufarmRewards.com).

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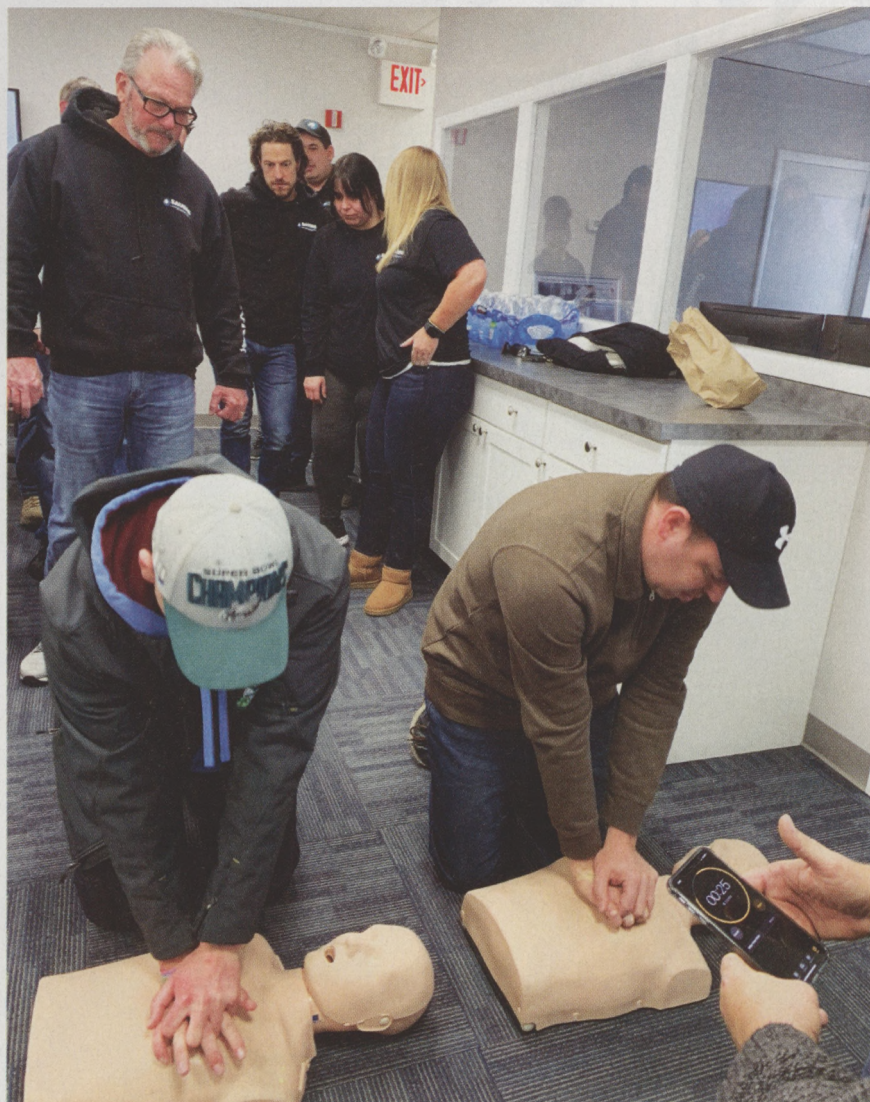
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DON'T LET DOWNTIME GET YOU DOWN

Whether in between snow events or during an unseasonable winter, training is an excellent activity to engage your workforce and strengthen your snow ops.

By Mike Zawacki

Professional snow and ice managers can use any downtime to engage in ongoing professional development, and workforce training is an effective means of strengthening and improving an operation. Zack Kelley, director of operations at Sauers Snow & Ice Management, a snow-only firm based in Philadelphia, suggests organizing training into three specific buckets – operations, including day-to-day tasks; risk management, which encompasses not only legal issues, but first-aid training; and culture building, which includes team building and improvement, as well as leadership.

“During any sort of downtime, polishing up on each of these three areas is a good use of a contractor’s time,” Kelley says.

OPERATIONS. This is Sauers’ biggest training bucket and includes a number of different subcategories, Kelley explains. “And the biggest thing we’re focusing on is client communication,” he says. “And that goes for the guys shoveling the sidewalks all the way to the guys managing clients’ sites.”

For example, if a client approaches a Sauers’ employee with a question, to request additional service or has an issue that needs to be addressed, then they need to be educated on not only the appropriate response, but what the next step in the process is, Kelley says.

Every employee must have a working and thorough knowledge of not only how to communicate with clients about snow and ice management questions, but then how to communicate these concerns and requests internally with Sauers’ management team.

Kelley adds communication can be a very deep training topic. For example, how many managers know how to write a well-thought-out email, he asks.

“You want to be professional and you want to be concise,” Kelley says. “Your team must communicate the right details. And professionalism is a big point we’re trying to drive home this year. Phone calls and texts ... our snow managers run into all of those scenarios throughout a snowstorm, whereas some clients prefer an email, some prefer text,

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and others want a phone call. So, we try to train for all of those (scenarios)."

In addition, Sauers trains its employees on the ANSI Industry Standards for Snow and Ice Management, available through their affiliation with the Accredited Snow Contractors Association.

"We'll literally go through the Industry Standards with our people line by line," he says. "The way we do training with our snow managers is weekly, so we'll cover a few ANSI standards every week as a refresher, and we'll incorporate photos and videos as examples to reinforce the ANSI standards."

And if there's additional downtime, Kelley says Sauers ensures its snow managers complete ASCA-C training. "We won't typically do this in the fall because it's a crazy time for us getting ready for winter," he says. "But

COVID ALERT

This year, Sauers Snow and Ice Management has included CDC best practices as part of its training regimen to ensure its winter workforce is educated on the COVID-19 pandemic's ever-changing details.

"We've included COVID training as a big portion of our training," he says. "While our market may be in the green phase right now, we're still teaching best practices as if we were still in the yellow phase to ensure that everyone stays safe."

"We're a very professional organization in our region and we want to make sure we portray that in all aspects of our business," Kelley says.

when it doesn't snow, we typically have our guys engaged in the ASCA-C training during that time. We feel it's very beneficial. And

frankly, it's already premade so we don't have to remake it if it's already out there."

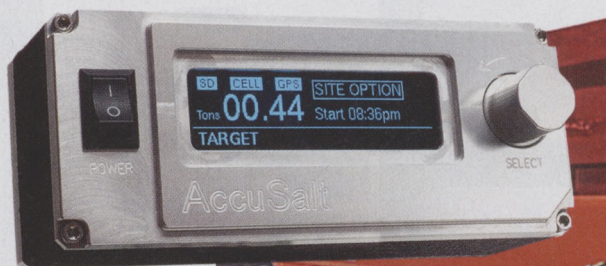
RISK MANAGEMENT. As the industry gets more litigious, snow contractors must seek out ways to protect themselves. Sauers addresses this issue at both a high level and at the operational level so even the guys on the frontlines shoveling know how to mitigate slip-and-fall conditions, Kelley says

"We talk about the importance of documentation and making sure they have the correct weather conditions down and they're prepared for anything," he says.

"We must limit risk, and we feel this starts with the guys in the field. And over the last couple of years we've caught more things this way because our ground crews have any eye out for these details."

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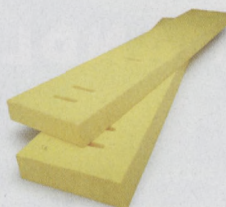
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training, Kelley says, and they stress the importance of being well prepared.

"We teach CPR and basic first-aid skills," he adds.

CULTURE. The team at Sauers Snow & Ice has focused on building a productive corporate culture over the last two or three years.

"It's made a huge difference in how we work and how people view us," Kelley says.

"And it's certainly something that can be worked on and implemented during season downtimes."

Part of building a strong culture involves gaining an understanding of what they can do better as a team and as individuals. To achieve this, Sauers reviews every single employee and service provider.

"We want them to know the chain of command and who their managers are because if

they have an issue it can be addressed immediately," Kelley says. In addition to individual assessments, the Sauers team seeks to gain a clear understanding of how their clients view their performance.

"Since last year was a down year for us for snow, we beefed up our surveying process to gain better client feedback," Kelley says.

"So, we survey all of our clients and all of our service providers and all of our employees after every single snow event ... regardless if it's just a salting event or a 6-8 inch storm.

Everyone receives a survey on their phone the next day that asks them to grade their manager, their response time, etc."

The survey has proven an effective way to highlight service issues.

"For example, all of our subs at the end of the year are graded on a scale from 0 to 100 on how they did," Kelley says. "That grade is

based on their communication, the documentation and app usage, their operational skills, were they on time and followed through on the scope of work ... this all goes to computing a grade at the end of the year."

With clients, the Sauers' team recognizes property managers don't have the time to fill out extensive survey questionnaires. So, instead, they field a single question to clients: Rate us on a scale of 1-10.

"If they respond with a seven or below, it automatically triggers a follow-up question that asks: We realize we could have done a better job with the storm, what areas specifically did you have an issue? These responses go to me and to the regional manager for that property and our goal is to address these issues within 24 hours," he says. **L&L**

The author is editor of Snow Magazine.

Get With The Program



The Snow Magazine Podcast, hosted by Editor Mike Zawacki, is an episodic series of 20-30-minute audio interviews in MP3 format focused on a variety of industry-related topics, trends, best practices, business management strategy and philosophy, and personalities.

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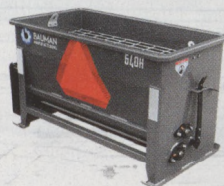
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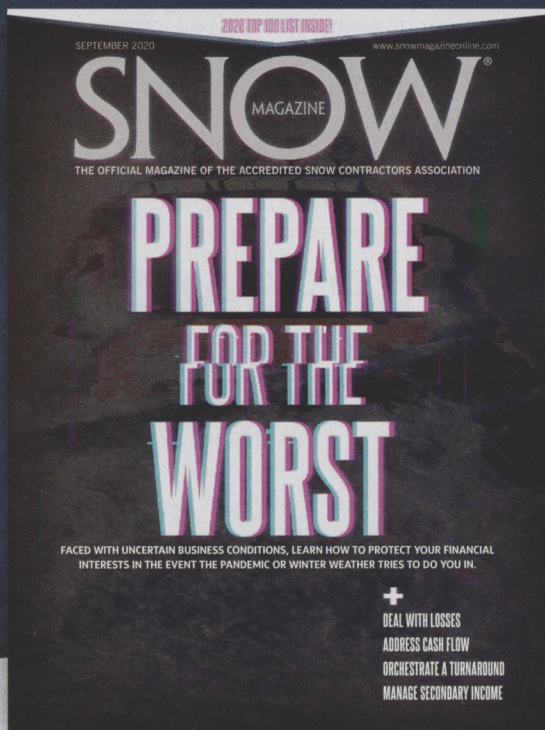
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WINTER'S NE

What will new weather data tell us about the future of snow and ice events?

By Mike Zawacki

I always enjoy collaborating with our weather buddies at Thermodynamic Solutions because, without fail, they always provide us not only with great insights about winter weather trends, but they do so in an easy-to-understand fashion. Recently, Co-Owner Beth Carpenter reached out about how the weather industry is closing the book on an old set of bench-marking numbers in lieu of more recent data, and what all of this has to say about snowfall totals.

Since Beth is the weather expert, I'll let her explain:

"As a consulting meteorologist, I frequently get asked to provide annual snowfall "averages" or "normal" – we'll use these terms interchangeably here – for a location to help snow removal companies build accurate contracts. We also use these averages to forecast general ideas for the winter season. For example, saying 'above normal snowfall is expected this winter.' I've previously discussed what these normals are and how they're used in weather forecasting. You can read that by entering bit.ly/34IOS3u into your browser.

"As I discussed in that blog post, the climate normal is the average condition, sum, etc. of a 30-year period. The current



W NORMALS

climate period that we use in meteorology is 1981-2010. However, after next winter, we'll be switching to a new climate period that will be 1991-2020. I wanted to examine how the snowfall "normal" will change for various cities across the snow belt. So, I've compiled the preliminary (though incomplete because it's missing this coming winter) data into the chart in the previous link.

"The results were very mixed. Locations such as Indianapolis won't see a significant change, with only a decrease in annual snowfall of roughly a half-inch.

"However, Cleveland will see an over four-inch decrease in average annual snowfall, which is much more significant. Bismarck and Minneapolis will see decreases in their average annual snowfall as well.

"Opposite of those locations, Boston will see a significant increase in average annual snowfall of more than four inches, with Green Bay and Glasgow seeing similar increases.

"Anecdotally, last year I researched the commonly held notion in the snow and ice management industry of the "Three Year Snow Cycle." This suggests that only one in every three years actually ends up with an "average" or "normal" snowfall. For a refresher on this, you can read that article by entering bit.ly/2ReZXTi into your browser.

"Suffice it to say, the new normals shouldn't change the notion of the three-year winter weather cycle. I would still expect that over a nine-year period, most locations will see three years at, above, and below the new normal." **L&L**

Mike Zawacki is editor of Snow Magazine.



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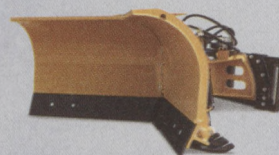
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Continued from pg. 59

A big catch

BY BRIAN HORN

It was touch and go for Paul Welborn and Lawn & Pest Solutions in Mississippi as COVID-19 caused shutdowns. But as the season continued, Welborn says the company has beaten its new-sales goal of \$625,000 for the year and is on track for \$775,000.

As of early September, the company is on pace to reach the overall revenue goal for 2020.

"As time wore on and we didn't see as much of an economic impact in our area, I think people got a little bit more free with their money," he says.

Welborn brought on a business developer and was able to nab a big commercial client that turned over about 75 properties to the company in May and added 25 additional properties in the first week of August.

Fortunately, the labor was already in place to handle the workload. Welborn said this year the company made a more concentrated effort to have people in the pipeline – interviewing and staying in touch with good candidate.

"We ran across a good guy, brought him in, let's say during the month of June and about two weeks later interviewed another

guy that we didn't yet need, but felt like we were headed in the direction that we would," he says. "We went ahead and brought him in and he came in during July."

One aspect Welborn came in really wanting to change was his inability to delegate tasks. He says he's about 70% of the way there, but still has trouble when it comes to technical advice.

For instance, if a technician asks him a question about a chemical application, he can be 10 minutes into the discussion before realizing he should have defaulted to the employee's direct report.

"I should have said, 'You need to go ask your manager and let me know if you don't get the answer you need,'" Welborn says.

As far as how the year will conclude, Welborn says the plan put in place at the beginning of the year was just what the company needed to succeed in 2020.

"We have had some years where we get to this point in the year and we're like, 'We have worked so hard, but we're falling short,'" he says. "But if we had not had a solid plan heading into this year, it could have really been a mess."

THE HARVESTERS' TAKE. On boarding a number of new people in the spring and early summer always presents issues for most companies and Lawn & Pest Solutions is no exception. In order to help The Harvesters suggested that each new person be teamed up with a "Buddy," to act as a coach for at least the person's first 90 days. To help bond the employees and foster a positive company culture he also had team meetings and even a cookout at his house with their families.

Paul feels his biggest challenge as he moves toward the end of the season is his cancel rate. Although it's only 15%, which is far better than most all lawn care and pest control companies, his goal is to get it under 10%. On our last call we thought out the pros and cons of hiring another manager to help reduce this. As of now, the verdict is out on what direction makes the best short- and long-term business sense. Regardless of the challenges Paul and the company faced thus far, it looks like he is moving toward a very successful season. ()

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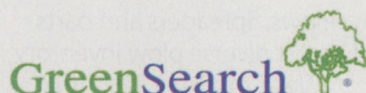
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Ben Collister

By Brian Horn

→ **The month of December** could play an important role in Ben Collister's life if everything goes as planned. The sophomore at Delaware Valley University in Pennsylvania is slated to graduate in December of 2021, and would one day like to open a Christmas Tree farm/nursery.



"I've always been interested in Christmas trees," says Collister, who won the Richard Foster Award, a scholarship available to outstanding students planning careers in the landscape, lawn care or horticulture business. "We've always had real Christmas trees growing up and that's always been something that my dad's wanted to do."

While the Christmas tree goal is more long-term, the drive to diversify his father's company, Collister Landscape Maintenance in Pennsylvania, is more urgent. As he works part-time at the company, he's envisioned adding design/build to its service portfolio.

That makes sense, being that he is majoring landscape design/build.

"This is laying the foundation –

getting my degree here and then I definitely need to add employees," he says.

He's also interested into branching out into commercial work.

"I just enjoy bigger properties," he says. "I also feel like it's a lot more profitable – less drive time between properties."

Collister has an entrepreneurial specialization, which is similar to a minor, in business. Taking those classes will come in handy since he hopes to eventually take on a managerial role at the company.

"There's quite a few business classes that are part of that – principles of marketing class, I have a management concepts class, business law," he says.

One lesson he has learned that a lot of landscapers struggle with is the balance between

working on the business versus working in one.

"Eventually, I'd like to move into more of a management type position where I oversee stuff and have more people that can be out there in the field," he says. "Because it's pretty hard to grow a business if you're out in the field all day, every day. You can't be focused on marketing and selling and meeting with clients, all that type of thing."

And he knows to do that, you need to develop talent to take on the day-to-day tasks.

"Another personal goal is to develop a great team of salespeople, crew leaders and crew members. Developing this type of team will allow me to both achieve my professional goals as well as my personal goal of mov-

ing into a management position," he wrote in his submission essay.

One takeaway from his college courses, which will help him as enters a management role, is how much networking plays an important role in business.

"I didn't really realize how powerful that can be before coming to school here," he says.

As Collister gets closer to his graduation date, he's going to take in all he can while at school.

"We have some pretty great professors, teaching all the courses that have had real world experience, whether that be through owning their business or working for other larger companies," he says. "They've been here a long-time teaching this, so they really know the material." **L&L**



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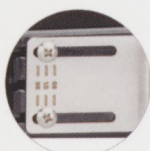
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