

JUNE 2021

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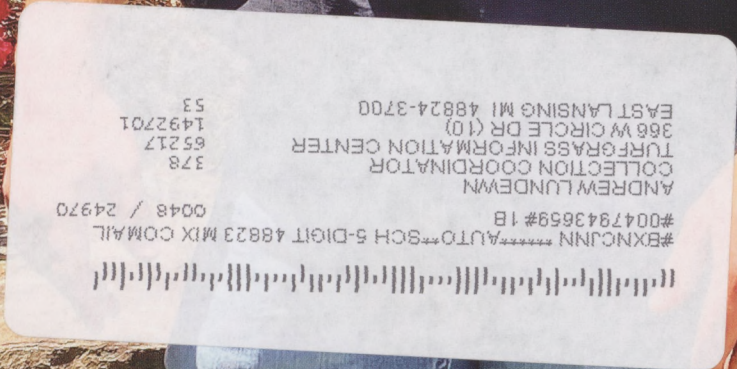
# Lawn & Landscape

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Sean Blair's affinity for fitness lets him lead crews through back-breaking work with expertise and empathy.



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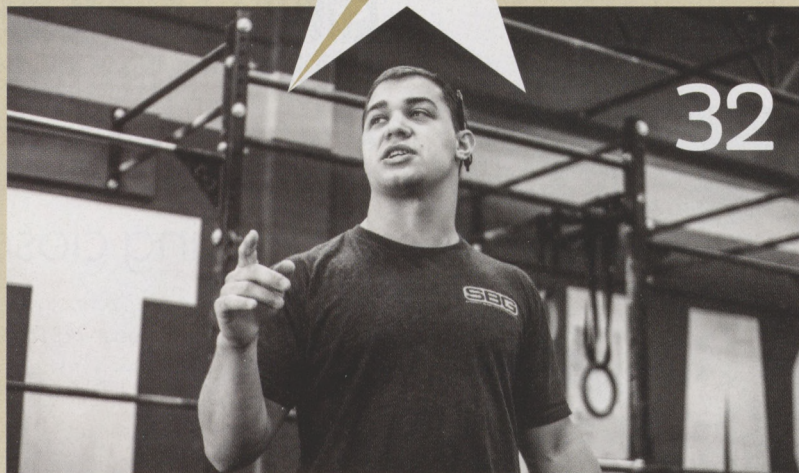


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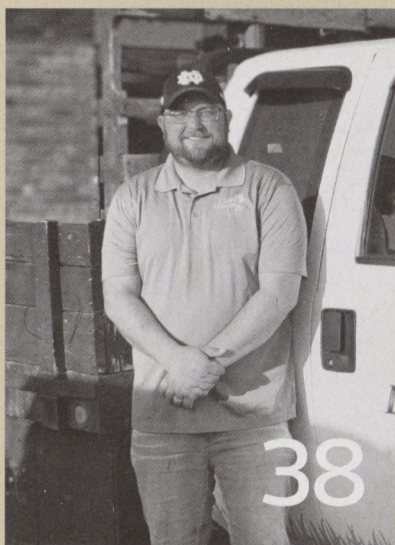
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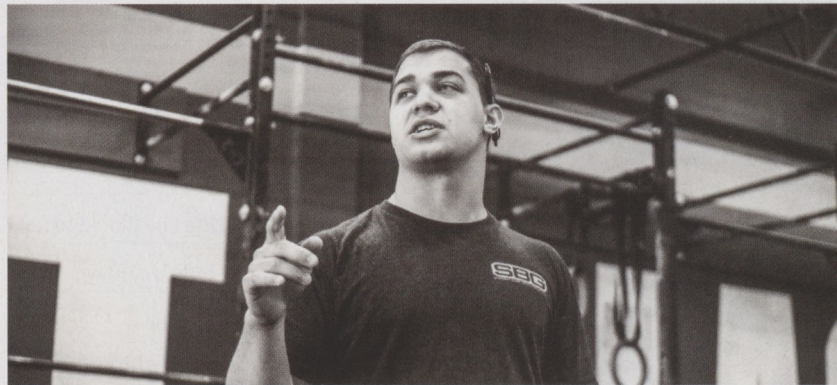


Compact tractors can help you perform myriad jobs all season long. PG. 64



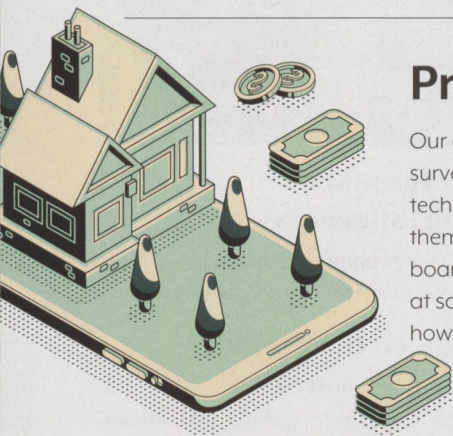
## ONLINE CONTENTS

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# SHINING STARS

Every year we highlight individuals who are not only standout employees at their workplace, but who are also kind, compassionate and looking to make a difference. As you read about this year's honorees, you'll learn what sets them apart in and out of the green industry. You can also head to our website and see Employee of the Year winners from years past. Head to [bit.ly/llcyy](https://bit.ly/llcyy) now. Check the page periodically as the 2022 application will be up later this year.



## Prioritize technology

Our annual tech report is included in this issue. We surveyed hundreds of companies, so find out what technology they are using more of, how it's benefiting them and how they've gotten their employees on board with using it. You can also take a look online at some of our tech reports from past years and see how things have changed and what's trending now.

Visit: [bit.ly/TechreportLL](https://bit.ly/TechreportLL)

# Lawn & Landscape TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE

**AUG. 31-SEPT. 2, 2021**  
ORLANDO, FLORIDA

## It's getting closer

The Lawn & Landscape Technology Conference is fast approaching. From drones to electric equipment to how technology can help profitability, retention and customer service, you'll be ready to fully embrace technology after attending this fun and educational opportunity! The event is scheduled for Tuesday, Aug. 31, through Thursday, Sept. 2, in Orlando, Florida. Pricing, hotel information and more is available at [bit.ly/LLtechconference](https://bit.ly/LLtechconference).

## Simple service opportunities

Giving back is important — and there were plenty of opportunities to do so in 2020. We talk to Mike Haynes, founder of Loving, in a recent podcast to discuss his latest venture, Industry Collective. This project is designed to create a positive impact by connecting landscaping companies across the country with service projects they can take part in locally. Take a listen to our "Doing your part" podcast to learn more about Haynes, Industry Collective and ways to get involved. You can find it here: [bit.ly/doingyourpart](https://bit.ly/doingyourpart)

## A positive outlook

Harvesters Ed Laflamme and Alison Hoffman give an update on how the economy is faring and how the green industry is reacting. They look at impacts of COVID vaccines, material costs, real estate and more. Also, find out the four things Ed thinks landscapers should be paying attention to right now. Watch the video online here: [bit.ly/econupdateLL](https://bit.ly/econupdateLL).





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**Brian Horn**

Editor, Lawn & Landscape

“Industry companies continue to see the worthwhile investment technology can be. I know it can be pricey, but again, it’s an investment.”

# Don't be Blockbuster

**W**hen David Cooke opened the first Blockbuster video store in Dallas in 1985, he made it different from other video stores. At those mom-and-pop shops, you had to hope that one copy of Teen Wolf was returned on time and you happened to be at the store within minutes of its return.

So, Cooke stocked Blockbuster with tons of copies of new releases, stayed open until midnight and created a family atmosphere, which meant getting rid of the videos behind the back curtain.

But it was Cooke’s software that separated his store from everyone else. Instead of pen and paper logs to track videos going in and out, Cooke used databases to streamline inventory and made checking videos out more efficient. That allowed him to replicate stores faster than his competition and a year later he had 20 stores. By 2004, Blockbuster hit a peak of approximately 9,000 stores.

We all know the rest ...if you don’t, I recommend The Last Blockbuster on Netflix. And speaking of Netflix, Blockbuster could have bought the now streaming giant for \$50 million in 2000. They passed and the rest is history, although the former Blockbuster CFO claims that’s not why the blue and yellow monster failed. I’ll let you watch the documentary to get his point of view.

But the documentary does infer that Blockbuster executives were too focused on the cash pouring in and not the competitor right around the corner.

I bring this up because of the importance software and technology continue to play in the green industry. Our technology report, which you can read turning this around to the back cover, includes research and stories about how landscaper’s interest in technology continues to grow. Industry companies continue to see the worthwhile investment technology can be. I know it can be pricey, but again, it’s an investment — it’s what can help your company become more like Netflix and not falter like Blockbuster. — *Brian Horn*

## Lawn & Landscape

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Crystal Washington



Erica Orange

## Keynote speakers announced for 2021 Lawn & Landscape Technology Conference

Crystal Washington and Erica Orange will headline the event.

VALLEY VIEW, Ohio — Crystal Washington, technology strategist and futurist, and Erica Orange, executive vice president and COO of The Future Hunters, will be the keynote speakers at the 2021 Lawn & Landscape Technology Conference.

Washington's opening keynote will discuss how to use technology to increase efficiency while improving performance, including task automation. Orange's closing keynote will include several emerging trends that are shaping and impacting the future.

As a technology strategist and certified futurist, Washington takes complex social media, app and web topics and makes them easy to understand.

Washington's clients comprise Fortune 500 companies including Google, Microsoft and GE. She is one of Forbes' 50 Leading Female Futurists and the author of the books *One Tech Action* and *The Social Media Why*.

### Lawn & Landscape TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE

AUGUST 31-SEPTEMBER 2, 2021  
ORLANDO, FLORIDA

Erica Orange is executive vice president and chief operating officer of The Future Hunters, one of the world's leading futurist consulting firms. She evaluates emerging social, technological, economic, political, demographic and environmental trends – and identifies the strategic implications of those trends for several influential Fortune 500 companies, trade associations and public sector clients.

Orange frequently speaks to a wide range of global audiences and has also authored

numerous articles, book chapters and industry white papers on cutting-edge, future-focused topics.

The pair join an impressive list of industry speakers who have successfully integrated software and technology into their landscaping, lawn care and pest control companies.

Conference sessions and speakers have been carefully chosen by the editors of *Lawn & Landscape*, producer of the conference, editors of sister publication *Pest Control Technology (PCT)* and the 2021 Conference Advisory Board.

"With so many companies going remote in 2020 due to COVID-19, technology was needed more than ever for companies to function on a daily basis," said Brian Horn, *Lawn & Landscape's* editor. "Crystal and Erica will give the audience big picture perspectives on how 2020 changed the way businesses will operate moving forward and how to do so effectively."

This marks the second year for the *Lawn & Landscape Technology Conference*, and will take place once again in Orlando, Florida, Aug. 31-Sept. 2, 2021 at a new location — Omni Orlando Resort at Championsgate.

Along with the new location, there is expanded education for pest management professionals powered by sister publication *Pest Control Technology (PCT)*, and a virtual option is available for those unable to make the face-to-face event. Additionally, attendees will experience organized networking as well as access to an exhibit hall.

"This year's conference offers a one-of-a-kind networking opportunity between two service industries that not only survived, but in many cases excelled, during the world-wide pandemic," states Dave Szy, publisher *Lawn & Landscape*. "The exchange between professionals in both industries will be just as valuable as the education programming."

Conference details are now available at [litechconference.com](http://litechconference.com).

Attendee registration is open, and Early Bird Registration rates are now available until July 23, 2021. Registration information can be found at [bit.ly/litechreg](http://bit.ly/litechreg).



## LANDSCAPE ASSOCIATES IN WISCONSIN JOINS KUJAWA ENTERPRISES

KEI is a partner company of Sperber Landscape Companies.

MILWAUKEE — Landscape Associates of De Pere recently joined Kujawa Enterprises, a Milwaukee provider in commercial landscape services, expanding service offerings into the Green Bay and Fox Valley Region of Wisconsin.

Landscape Associates, founded in 1990 by Gerry Andrews, has provided commercial and residential landscape management and construction services. Andrews will continue to provide local leadership of the company alongside his existing management team.

"This partnership secures the future for Landscape Associates and our employees," Andrews said. "We're excited to see

the great things that are ahead of us." KEI, family operated for 57 years, is a partner company of Sperber Landscape Companies and is a full-service four-season landscape management contractor.

"Gerry has done a wonderful job building such a well-respected organization," said KEI President, Chris Kujawa. "KEI is excited to bring together two excellent family-oriented Wisconsin companies and we are thrilled to become a part of the fabric of the Green Bay community."

This latest announcement comes on the heels of last month's news that Sperber partnered with Northern California company Cagwin & Dorward.

## BARTLETT TREE EXPERTS ACQUIRES WESTREE

The acquisition, completed May 3, is Bartlett's latest in California.

STAMFORD, CONN. — Bartlett Tree Experts has acquired Westree, Inc., a tree care business that has operated in the Santa Barbara, California area for over 31 years.

The acquisition expands Bartlett's footprint across North America and bolsters the company's presence in California, where it currently has nine offices. The acquisition further enlarges Bartlett's tree care services in Montecito, Carpinteria, and throughout Santa Barbara.

"This acquisition allows us to really grow in this market," said Peter Andreucci, vice president and division manager of Bartlett's California division. "Westree has been a well-respected family business for a long time and was a good fit for

us to acquire because they had a similar philosophy to ours; doing great tree work with a focus on providing scientific tree care, focused on safety and delivering excellent customer service."

Bartlett has maintained a presence on the West Coast for over 40 years. The acquisition, which was completed May 3, is Bartlett's latest in California.

"Growth through acquisition continues to be a strong path forward for us," said Jim Ingram, president and COO of Bartlett Tree Experts. "We are excited about our expansion in new and existing markets, providing a full range of scientific tree and shrub care services for our customers to maintain beautiful, healthy landscapes."

## LOVING ACQUIRES BABCOCK RANCH SOD FARM

Babcock Ranch is an 18,000-acre, solar-powered town planned for 19,500 homes.

GASTONIA, N.C. — LOVING has acquired the Babcock Ranch Sod Farm located in Fort Myers, Florida. LOVING and Kitson & Partners worked on the framework of the arrangement to ensure a transition for employees, clients and vendors.

"We are beyond excited to build upon the rich history that has been created over the past 23 years at the Babcock Ranch Sod Farm," said LOVING Founder and President Mike Haynes. "This is a farm that produces top-notch quality sod from a top-notch quality team. Syd Kitson and his entire team at Kitson & Partners have done a great job of continuing the legacy of the Babcock family. We are grateful and excited to continue to build upon the history that has been created over the years at this farm."

Babcock Ranch is an 18,000-acre, solar-powered town is planned for 19,500 homes and up to 6 million square feet of commercial and retail space at build-out.

LOVING is headquartered in Gastonia, N.C., and offers landscaping, outdoor living, and sod supply to both local and national homebuilding clients throughout the Southeast.

## SCHILL GROUNDS MANAGEMENT ACQUIRES TWO CINCINNATI COMPANIES

The company acquired Ward + Thornton Landscapes and Fredericks Landscaping.

CINCINNATI — Schill Grounds Management is expanding into the Cincinnati market with the purchase of two full-service landscaping companies that have served southern Ohio for a combined 90 years.

Schill has acquired Ward + Thornton Landscapes, which was founded more than 50 years ago and is based in Maineville, Ohio. Ward + Thornton provides full-service

landscape, maintenance, snow management and design-build services to numerous customers in northeast Cincinnati and beyond.

Schill also purchased Fredericks Landscaping, which is based in Cincinnati and has been providing full-service landscaping and snow management to customers in central Cincinnati and northern Kentucky

for more than 40 years. The southeastern Ohio acquisitions expand Schill's presence beyond its primary markets of Cleveland and Columbus, and represent the third and fourth acquisitions Schill has completed in recent months.

Schill will operate out of the existing Ward + Thornton and Fredericks facilities, while approximately 200 employees from the companies will join the Schill family.

"We are delighted to show our new employees and customers in Cincinnati what makes Schill a best-in-class partner for year-round grounds management services," said President Jerry Schill, who co-founded Schill Grounds Management over 25 years ago.

Mike Ward, the former owner of Ward + Thornton, will oversee the consolidated operations in the region in a new role as Schill's market president for Cincinnati.

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## MAKITA BREAKS GROUND ON NEW ATLANTA FACILITY

The ceremonial groundbreaking marks the beginning of construction for a new 600,000 square-foot facility.

HALL COUNTRY, Ga. — Makita U.S.A. held a ceremonial groundbreaking recently to launch construction of a new 600,000 square-foot facility northeast of Atlanta in



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Hall County, Ga. The new facility will be constructed on 80 acres of land and is part of Makita's planned future development to address continuing growth in the United States.

"Today Makita begins a new phase of expansion with the construction of another new facility," said Joe Blackwell, senior vice president operations, Makita U.S.A. "This is part of our continuing growth here in the U.S.A., and this new facility will further increase our operations, service and training capabilities. This means expanded service

and support for our customers, while creating more jobs in the region."

The new facility will serve as a distribution center, and will also include a sales and training center, customer service resources and a Factory Service Center. The location has adjacent space for future expansion up to 800,000 square feet.

The groundbreaking marks another milestone in Makita's investment in the U.S.A. Construction of the Atlanta-area facility follows the August 2020 opening of a new distribution, training and service facility in Reno, Nev., and the 2017 opening of a similar facility in Wilmer, Texas. Makita's distribution chain also includes operations in Mt. Prospect, Ill., Buford, Ga., and La Mirada, Calif. Additionally, the manufacturing and assembly plant in Buford is one of 10 Makita manufacturing facilities worldwide.

## WORKWAVE ACQUIRES SLINGSHOT

Slingshot will continue to support its customers operating on non-WorkWave platforms.

Holmdel, N.J. — WorkWave, a software company, acquired Slingshot, a provider of customer call center software combined with outsourced sales, lead, and customer response services.

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field service owner and executive awake at night. Slingshot is not just the market leader at helping its customers grow, it is the only organization of its kind in our industry that has a proven track record of using omni-channel communication software to close more deals for its customers,” said David F. Giannetto, CEO of WorkWave.

“By bringing such an outstanding organization into WorkWave, we will be able to provide unique integrations into our solutions that will increase the unparalleled advantage our customers have over their competition, reinforcing that WorkWave is the premier partner to service organizations.”

Customers can utilize this platform and the Slingshot team to enable or outsource their sales operation. Slingshot will continue to support its customers operating on

non-WorkWave platforms, but integrations with WorkWave solutions will increase the value for customers using WorkWave .

“We’re thrilled to be a part of WorkWave’s industry leadership and portfolio of solutions, working together to provide strong, measurable value for our customers,” said Jon Soldan, CEO of Slingshot and now SVP of Slingshot Operations for WorkWave.

“Slingshot has always been about enabling conversations and more effective interactions between home service professionals and their customers, and by joining forces with WorkWave, we’ll be able to accelerate our goal of a tech-enabled contact center with 360-degree data and reporting, better scheduling and payment opportunities, and greater conversion for our customers.”

## STIHL EXPANDS WITH OPENING OF NEW WASHINGTON LOCATION

The Centralia, Washington, location boasts 100,000 square feet.

VIRGINIA BEACH, Va. — STIHL expanded and relocated its STIHL Northwest branch operations with the opening of its new

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## ➔ THE NEW LOCATION WILL SERVE STIHL DEALERS IN WASHINGTON, OREGON, IDAHO AND ALASKA.

location in Centralia, Wash. The new facility increases warehouse space, as well as technology upgrades that will enhance the company's ability to serve the 500-plus STIHL dealers in Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Alaska.

"We are extremely pleased to celebrate the opening of this new and expanded location," said STIHL President Bjoern Fischer.

"This 100,000-square-foot facility represents our continued investment in the growth of locally owned STIHL Dealers

and our confidence in the U.S. market."

The new location adds more warehouse space with taller, longer racks and more efficient picking methods to speed up the fulfillment of dealer orders and deliveries.

Additionally, separate classroom, workshop and training facilities will provide STIHL Northwest the ability to offer their dealers enhanced training and technical service capabilities.

"The new facility more than doubles our warehouse square footage and gives us additional space for future growth," said Casey Kralovetz, director of branch operations at STIHL Northwest.

"STIHL dealers are the core of our business and the new location with improved efficiency of our warehouse operations, enables us to deliver products to most of our dealers within 24 to 48 hours."

## DOOSAN BOBCAT INVESTS \$70 MILLION IN STATESVILLE, N.C.

The expansion will double the footprint, increase campus to 160 acres and add 250 jobs.

WEST FARGO, N.D. — Doosan Bobcat North America has plans for a \$70 million expansion of its Statesville, N.C., manufacturing

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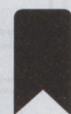
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facility. The company plans to construct an additional 580,000 square feet for its manufacturing operations, which will create 250 new, full-time jobs over the next five years in Iredell County. The construction is expected to begin July 2021, with full project completion expected May 2022.

This new investment will enable the company to meet a growing demand for all Doosan Bobcat products, including its Doosan Portable Power equipment and the growing line of Bobcat grounds maintenance and landscaping industry products.

"This level of investment demonstrates our commitment to North Carolina, which has been an important manufacturing location for us since 2008," said Mike Ballweber, president of Doosan Bobcat North America. "We are dedicated to the continued expansion of our compact equipment line to help

empower our customers to accomplish more, and our Statesville location has been an important part of this success."

Doosan Bobcat's investment in the Statesville facility through construction of the new expansion spaces and equipment purchases will grow the floorplan from nearly 500,000 square feet today, to more than 1 million square feet when complete. The company's acquisition of 68 acres adjacent to the current, 92-acre campus will allow for the addition of 500,000 square feet of attached manufacturing space and 80,000 square feet of attached warehouse and distribution space.

The Statesville operation's current team of 400 full-time employees will grow through this project, which will result in the creation of 42 new jobs in the first two years, and up to 250 new jobs in five years.

# CORONA TOOLS NAMES NEW PRESIDENT

Eric Prendeville bring over 20 years of experience to the role.

CORONA, Calif. — Corona Tools has named Eric Prendeville as the new president, effective immediately.

Corona is a unit of the Venanpri Tools division of the Venanpri Group.

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—Karl T. Hunter,  
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→ **IT WAS SO HELPFUL TO NETWORK AND LEARN ABOUT THE DIFFICULTIES OTHERS ARE FACING WITH IMPLEMENTATION AND HOW THEY OVERCAME THE SAME CHALLENGES WE FACED.”**

**KAREN KLEIN**

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**EARLY BIRD  
REGISTRATION  
ENDS JULY 23, 2021**

**AUG. 31-SEPT. 2, 2021  
ORLANDO, FLORIDA**

Prendeville brings over 20 years of experience working with Stanley Black and Decker in several commercial and product development leadership positions.

He studied at Salisbury University, Perdue School of Business and holds a Bachelor of Science- Business Management with a Minor in Communications.

“Eric is a great addition to Corona and we look forward to his leadership & experience in the U.S./ Can hand tools market as we continue to accelerate our global business growth by delivering world class solutions to our customers” said Tom Welke, CEO of Venanpri Group.

Corona also announced that Steve Erickson, current president at Corona, will be retiring effective June 1, 2021.

➔ **ERIC PRENDEVILLE WILL BE TAKING OVER THE ROLE OF PRESIDENT FROM STEVE ERICKSON, WHO IS SET TO RETIRE.**

## LAWN OKLAHOMA MERGES WITH GREEN GROUP

TULSA, Okla. — Green Group, a national turf care company, recently partnered with Lawn Oklahoma to further build on their entry into the Tulsa market.

Lawn Oklahoma specializes in lawn care, tree and shrub care and mosquito control services for commercial and residential properties in the Tulsa metro. Lawn Oklahoma merged into Green Group Oklahoma, taking on the Green Group

name. The company retained all Lawn Oklahoma employees and is transitioning them to Green Group.

As part of the partnership, Green Group will expand service offerings to the Tulsa market.

“I’m thrilled to join forces with the Lawn Oklahoma team and to create a positive impact in the Tulsa lawn care market,” said Benjamin Allen, vice president of the Midwest Region for Green Group.

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REGISTRATION  
ENDS JULY 23, 2021**

**AUG. 31-SEPT. 2, 2021  
ORLANDO, FLORIDA**

## CATERPILLAR FOUNDATION DONATES \$3.4 MILLION IN COVID RELIEF

The company is collaborating with relief organizations to provide essential medical supplies.

DEERFIELD, Ill.— Caterpillar and the Caterpillar Foundation, the company's philanthropic arm, announced a series of targeted relief efforts to support countries struggling with a significant rise of COVID-19 cases.

As part of the Caterpillar Foundation's ongoing response to COVID-19, it is collaborating with partners and relief organizations to provide essential medical supplies

and improve equitable access to vaccines.

The Caterpillar Foundation is giving \$1 million to help India's health system deliver care to families and communities by funding medical equipment, including oxygen concentrators and oxygen plant optimization, as well as critical medical supplies. In addition to the Foundation's efforts, Caterpillar India is providing an

initial contribution of \$1.4 million, enabling an additional supply of oxygen, donating beds with ventilator support to hospitals, supporting vaccination drives and setting up temporary relief shelters.

Additionally, in Brazil, the Foundation is donating \$250,000 to help coordinate with local partners to deliver essential medical and basic service supplies to hospitals and communities.

The Caterpillar Foundation, through its partnership with the UN Foundation and the WHO Foundation, is supporting the COVAX initiative to promote equitable access to COVID-19 vaccinations with a \$500,000 gift.

Additionally, the Foundation is investing \$250,000 to support the Ad Council and COVID Collaborative's COVID-19 Vaccine Education Initiative, "It's Up To You." **L&L**



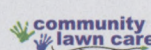
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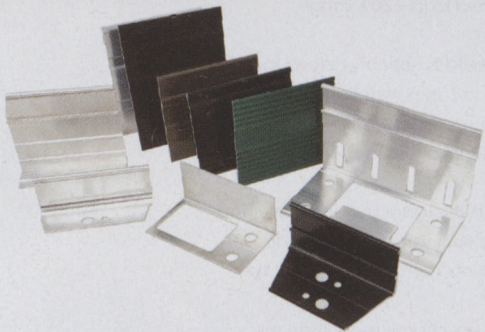
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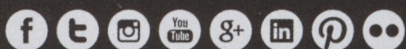
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# THE PRICE IS RIGHT

→ **RECENTLY I WORKED WITH** two landscape installation contractors who installed both residential and commercial projects. Gunther hailed from Utah, and Zane was headquartered in Idaho. They had archaic estimating systems that were a combination of hourly rates, equipment rates and material markups. They wanted to systematize their pricing while making it simpler and more consistent. I identified two KPIs that I thought would help them achieve their objectives that I'd like to share with you.

**UNDERSTANDING MARGINS.** In financial terms, a margin is the difference between the costs to produce a project and its price to the buyer. There are two types of margins — gross profit margin (GPM) and net profit margin (NPM). Let me illustrate with a \$10,000 planting job.

- \$2,500** Material cost
- \$2,000** Field labor cost
- \$500** Field labor burden cost
- \$1,000** Field truck and equipment cost
- \$6,000** Total direct costs (TDC)
- \$2,000** General and administrative (G&A) cost
- \$2,000** Net profit margin
- \$10,000** Price to the customer

GPM can be calculated two ways. You could add the G&A overhead cost to the NPM to total \$4,000, or 40%. Or, you could subtract the TDC from the price and arrive at the same figures.

The break-even point (BEP) is calculated by adding the TDC to the G&A overhead costs or \$8,000 (80%) in our example.

NPM is calculated by subtracting the BEP from the price or \$2,000 (20%).

**UNDERSTANDING PRICING.** Next, we need to understand market pricing and what I refer to as market predisposition. By market predisposition, I mean that there are certain price points that the market favors and rallies around: unit prices for various products such as pavers, zones or heads for irrigation systems, hourly rates for maintenance, and so forth. Once you understand and know these price points, you have a much better idea how your customers will respond to your pricing.

- **Retail or list price:** This is the price that a homeowner pays a nursery for a plant.
- **Re-wholesale price:** This is the discounted price that a contractor pays the nursery for the same plant. It is discounted because the contractor gives the supplier multiple jobs, not just one as does a homeowner; and the contractor is the sales person for the product. As such the discount is somewhat of a reverse discount credited to the contractor.
- **Wholesale price:** This is the amount that the supplier or vendor pays the grower or manufacturer for the materials.

An overly simplistic example might be a plant that the grower sells to the supplier for \$5. The supplier multiplies his cost by 2.0 and charges the homeowner a \$10 retail price. However, the supplier sells the plant at a re-wholesale discounted price of \$7.50 to the contractor.

## HOW IT WORKS IN THE FIELD.

• **Residential installation work (the contractor works for the homeowner):** In today's robust market, you should add a minimum of a 20% net profit margin to the BEP when pricing residential work. You should strive for a 40% GPM on such work. You could reduce your NPM by 5% for jobs over \$100,000. This would produce a GPM in the range of 35% or so.

• **Commercial installation work (the contractor works for the GC, builder, etc.):**

You're a sub-contractor when you work for a GC, builder, etc. A subcontractor should provide the GC, builder, etc. a discounted price for his or her work. This discount usually amounts to 10-15%. This allows the GC to add a 10-15% margin to the subcontractor's work and sell it to the end user at a retail price. Here are some minimum KPIs for commercial installation work:

- The GPM on such work should generally be 25% +/-5%.
- You should price negotiated work in the mid to high twenty-percent range — 25 -30%.
- You should price competitive "low-bid-takes-all" work in the mid to low 20% range.

**CONCLUSION.** These KPIs not only helped to simplify Gunther's and Zane's installation pricing, but it also made it more consistent. In today's market, these residential and commercial KPIs are very accurate.

Break down your bids similar to my illustration above and compare your margins to mine for both your residential and commercial work. I bet they'll be fairly close.

Of course, if you can, charge more than my KPI benchmarks. The better you understand your own (and the market's) pricing, the better you'll reflect market conditions. This should make you a smarter (and richer) estimator. **L&L**

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**TAKE A LOOK AT HOW YOU'RE ESTIMATING,** and make sure you're calculating your gross profit and net profit margins correctly.

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

# TURN YOUR ORGANIZATION INTO A CHAMPIONSHIP TEAM

→ **WHAT KEY ELEMENTS** take players from rookie to elite and on to win championships, or lead teams and companies to the top 1% or Top 100? As companies rise to the top, the percentages keep getting smaller. The majority of companies in this industry don't even make it to \$ 1 million in revenue.

The ratios are similar when analyzing the success of world-class sports teams. Even when new owners inject insane amounts of money into their organizations, money alone will not take your team to the finals.

I've played and competed at a high level in intense sports such as soccer and rugby, but I never got to the elite status. However, I did achieve elite status in Ironman races — a field where only 0.01% of athletes ever successfully complete a full Ironman race. I have completed four.

Achieving Ironman status gives me an insider's look at how championship mindsets are built, and what it takes for athletes and businesses to win. Here are six simple strategies that each organization can use to get their team to the top:

1. **A great coach.** Business teams need an experienced coach who can call the plays and bring out the personal best in all their players. In rugby, we have a head coach and specialist coaches for performance positions, such as the back and forwards, since they have unique skills. In business, you'd have a leadership coach, a sales coach, specialty coaches for different segments of the industry and a strong level of alignment among the coaching team.
2. **A winning vision.** You need an inspiring call to action that motivates your team to buy-in to the dream. Work on every aspect of your strategy, the plays on and off the field, give them the support they need to win with no expense spared.
3. **The right players in the right position.** Not all the players need to be elite, but they need to be coachable, open to listening and respecting the opinions from the coaches trying to build a team of individuals eager to win together.
4. **Data.** Statistics will let you know what your competition is up to, give you important context for performance improvement, and help you develop the real strengths of your players rather than spend-

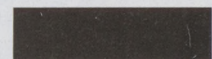
ing too much time fixing their weaknesses. I remember a story about Messi nearly quitting soccer soon after moving to Italy to play because they spent all their time trying to get him to kick with his right foot. The frustration was too much and after nearly quitting, the coaches gave up and invested instead in giving him room to win.

5. **Discipline and structure.** Be hyper-focused on execution. This could mean attending all practice sessions, even in bad weather, not being late for team meetings, or even having a curfew after a certain time. An accountability framework needs to be communicated clearly and repeated often. I have seen many coaches make tough decisions by dropping some of their top players for infringing on some of the mutually agreed-upon team rules.

6. **Culture and Rapport.** Team chemistry is critical, not only to wins and losses on the field, but also to your financial success. If teams are not fully aligned with complete trust in each other, then cracks begin to show and can quickly accelerate. If players undermine others, team unity breaks down. If trust, rapport and team culture thrive, then the results can be amazing.

For example, during the Ryder Cup golf championship, when the American team was clearly more skilled on paper, the European team handsomely won the tournament due to hard work and skill, but most importantly, the bond and commitment to each other. **L&L**

↓  
**FOCUSING ON THESE SIX STRATEGIES** will help you improve your team and take your company to the next level.







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# BE READY FOR THE THREE QUESTIONS

→ **THE PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL MEETING** between a supervisor and subordinate employee is one of the most challenging and unpredictable events a supervisor must complete. Judging an employee's contribution to the company over an annual timeframe, providing convincing documentation to substantiate that rating and discussing a wage increase are just a few of the key topics a supervisor has to consider, anticipate and address with poise and professionalism.

While standard performance appraisal training frequently touches on myriad points, seldom does that training prepare the supervisor to respond appropriately to difficult questions posed by the subordinate.

With that premise in place, every supervisor should be ready to confidently answer the following three questions whether they are asked by the subordinate or not:

**1. "Why did you give me a rating of #?"** For the sake of example, let's presume the supervisor gave the employee a rating of "3" (i.e., "Meets Expectations") on the performance dimension of Employee Safety. This is a credibility crossroad for the supervisor.

The employee is demanding justification from the supervisor to validate the rating. If the supervisory does not provide satisfactory evidence for the rating, the supervisor, the rating and indeed the entire performance appraisal will be viewed as illegitimate in the eyes of the employee. In response, the supervisor must present multiple behavioral examples supporting the rating ("you attend all of the safety tailgate sessions," or "you are always in proper PPE.").

**2. "What do I have to do to get a rating of 4?"** This is another thinly veiled test for the supervisor, one in which the subordinate wants to see if the supervisor has a type of development plan indicative of a clairvoyant path tailored for subordinate improvement. The supervisor must always have this response ready.

For example, the supervisor could list the following behaviors that indicate the next level of performance (i.e., "Exceeds Expectations"): "Volunteer to be a spotter every time your vehicle is backing up in the morning," "Before you begin working at a jobsite, walk the job to identify any potential safety hazards," and "Double check that all equipment is securely positioned, fastened, or locked in the trailer or bed of the truck before leaving the jobsite."

**3. "What do I have to do to make more money?"** Don't be indignant, judgmental or hypocritical of this implied or expressed question; every one of us has this same thought in mind every day. To be succinct: The answer must include goal achievement. The capitalist assumption is if

all employees reach the goals assigned to them, the company will then necessarily achieve its goals, which culminates in reinforcement being distributed throughout the company.

To that end, there must be a clear connection between the organization's goals, the department's goals, the work crew's goals and the employee's goals. If a management team cannot identify the specific goals and performance expectations connecting the key performance indicators threading the entire organization vertically, they should not be managers.

The supervisor should be able to articulate the specific goals for each employee at any moment (e.g., "you have to ensure that all of your jobs are completed within the established labor hours standard which helps the company achieve its gross margin goal," "you have to ensure that each job is completed according to its job quality standards, which helps the company achieve its job retention goal.")

If the employee does that, and all employees follow suit, the company will make more money, and by derivation, so should the employee. But keep in mind: It all starts at the top or all three questions.

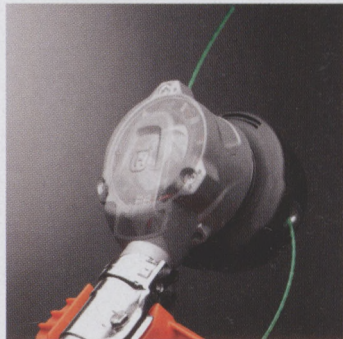
**SUMMARY.** As the performance appraisal process becomes more critical to aligning employee performance with organizational results, supervisors must increase their ability to consider that process from the subordinate's vantage point. Supervisors must raise their performance feedback skill set to draw clear connections between the subordinate's job performance and their desired outcomes. **L&L**

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**SUPERVISORS SHOULD BE READY** to give concrete, detailed examples when reviewing an employee's performance and discussing potential pay raises.

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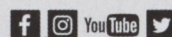
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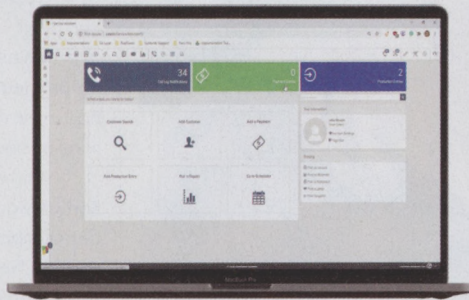
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# Deborah Cole

Writer/Speaker/Consultant, Founder and Former President of **Greater Texas Landscape Services**

**Editor's note:**

Deborah Cole is an active member of the National Association of Landscape Professionals Women in Landscape Network (powered by Bayer) which provides a forum for industry professionals to support each other's professional growth. The Network is free to all industry professionals.

**I NEVER CONSIDERED** myself a leader or mentor. As a young girl guided toward traditional roles of the day (you know the ones), my sights weren't set on leading anything or anyone, much less founding and leading a multimillion-dollar landscape corporation. The joke was on me: The universe had other plans.

After 35 years of a gazillion successes and an equal number of goofs, I left my employee-owned company in the hands of a talented group of leaders and leaders-in-training. On reflection, my proudest shared successes were the professional growth of team members. They morphed into leaders of enthusiasm, integrity and skills beyond what they thought possible. Mentoring women was an especial joy for me.

Admittedly, the majority of the staff in our company was male, many of whom felt that leadership in some form was their path. On the whole, the percentage

**WOMEN IN LAWN & LANDSCAPE** is a column brought to you in partnership with the National Association of Landscape Professionals.

of women working in green industry companies varies. Published figures indicate that there are fewer than 25% of females in production/leadership positions in landscape firms.

Why is this the case? Women continue to face challenges with workplace culture including societal beliefs about women and their abilities in the industry as well as pervasive stereotypes of women and what roles they can play.

When asked recently if I have any regrets in my former life as a leader in business, I responded that I wish that I had done more to encourage women in leadership roles in all businesses, not just ours.

Women-led companies excel. As reported by Forbes Magazine, these companies tend to perform better than male-led firms in the standard business metrics. Gender diverse companies stand out in more ways than one. Research shows that gender diversity results in increased productivity, greater innovation, better decision-making and higher employee retention and satisfaction. The Harris Poll shows that slightly greater than half of Americans surveyed prefer to work for a female leader. Along with surveyed workers indicating they prefer working for a woman, they state that in female-led groups, they feel the teams are more purpose-driven, more likely to offer equal pay and focus on fair and equitable working conditions.

Millennials who place a high value on work culture want to work with organizations that champion values which in the past have been considered "soft." These values are compassion, collaboration, and the freedom to be a unique individual. The same group said that women more often lead with a focus on these values and that having a female in an executive position makes them believe that they can also achieve a leadership role. More than once I was encouraged to stop worrying about the "soft stuff" and focus on numbers. I'm proud that I stood my ground (soft as it was.)

Leaving the industry in frustration should not be the only choice. I believe that being a role model and mentor when possible will move the needle on an increase in numbers of women in leadership while setting the stage for others in the future. Giving lip service to increasing numbers of women in leadership is not enough. We must lead by example and be the leaders and role models. Be the change we wish to see. The talents we have as women are essential to the success of green industry businesses whether in management, administration or operations. **L&L**



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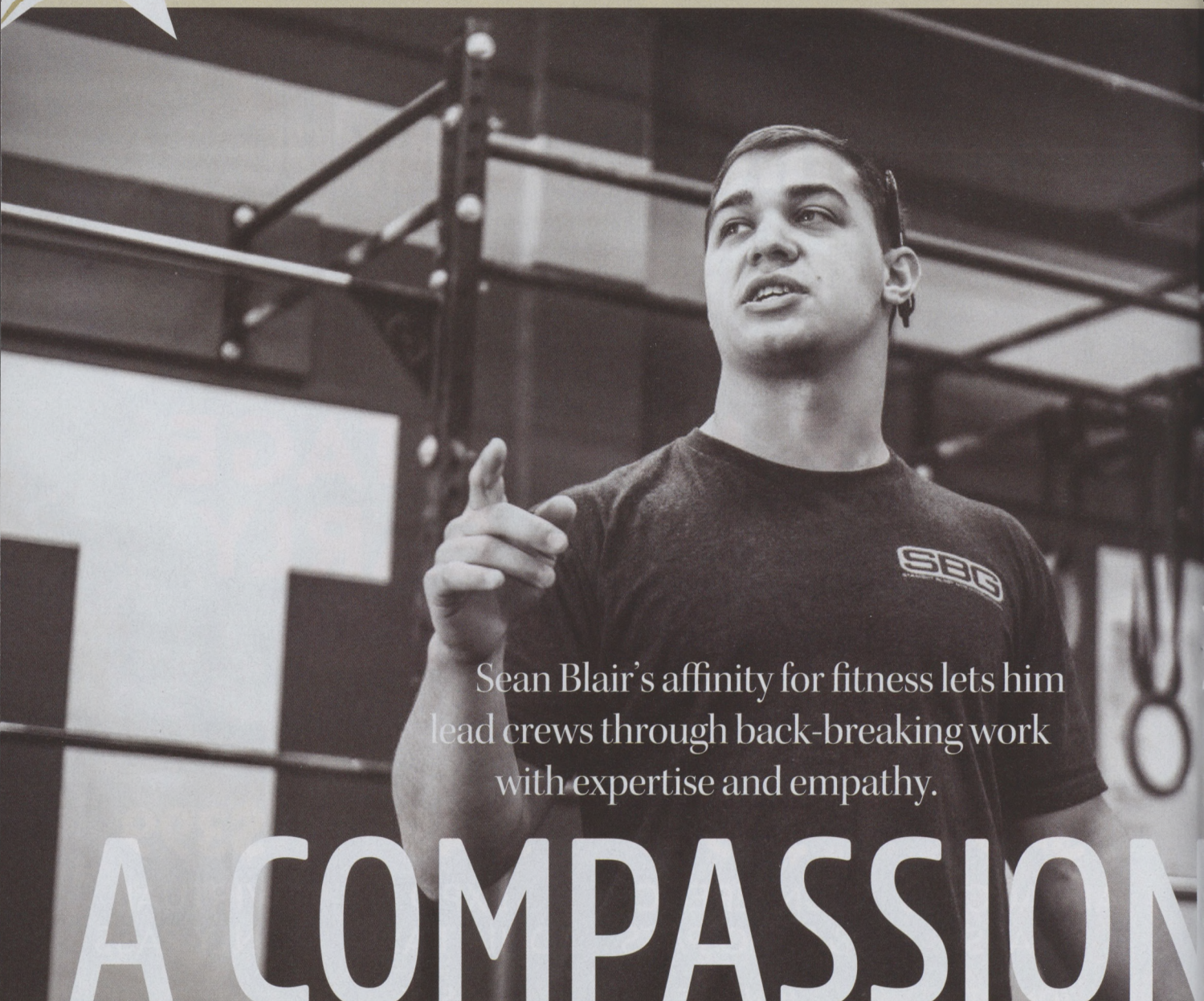
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**SEAN BLAIR** • LEGENDARY LANDSCAPING  
2021 EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR



Sean Blair's affinity for fitness lets him lead crews through back-breaking work with expertise and empathy.

A COMPASSION

COACH

By Kim Lux





**TOMMY BURSI**, owner of Buford, Georgia-based Legendary Landscaping, admits that Sean Blair was “pretty green” when he brought him into the green industry back in 2018. Nowadays, Blair is Bursi’s go-to guy and second in command, serving as the company’s senior project manager.

Bursi says it’s Blair’s dependability and driven nature that make him such a standout and a shoo-in for this award.

“Sean is always going to do the right thing,” he says. “Sean is going to be reliable and trustworthy and all those great character traits that we all aspire to have.”

**FORMATIVE FITNESS.** What led Bursi and Blair to begin working together was one of Blair’s passions — fitness, specifically CrossFit, powerlifting and Olympic weightlifting.

“I’ve known Sean Blair for a long time,” Bursi says. “We did CrossFit together and I met him at a CrossFit gym where he was a coach... our paths just kept crossing over the years, and we built a friendship together. And I came to the realization one night that he’d be a great person to invest time into training and I felt like it wouldn’t be wasted.”

Blair says fitness has been a fundamental part of his life for a long time.

“I’ve competed and coached in Olympic weightlifting for 15 years and I still compete now in powerlifting and bodybuilding,” he says. “I still live the fitness lifestyle. I eat my six meal-prepped meals every day, I hydrate, and I still compete, so I am still very much into it. And I still coach on the side.”

In fact, Blair says it’s his background in fitness that allows him to effectively lead Legendary’s crews each and every day.

“It’s given me the ability to work with people better,” he says. “That experience of having to explain things and look at them from different points of view to have people understand, made me a better communicator for sure. And communication is just one of the biggest things.”

Blair says that coaching has also taught him plenty about tolerance and patience — more essential qualities for leadership.

“If something doesn’t go as planned, I’m able to not get frustrated or angry and find another way to come up with a solution,” he says.

Bursi adds that everyone on the team knows about Blair’s fervor for fitness, and his physique has caused quite a few “mishaps” on the job over the years.

“The man is a bodybuilder, and I’ll say I’ve never seen a human rip more jeans than Sean,” Bursi says. “The man rips his jeans on a weekly basis.”

**HIGHLIGHTING HEALTHY CHOICES.** Nothing goes hand-in-hand with training more than nutrition and hydration, so Blair’s become a bit of an expert over the years. And he’s adamant about passing that knowledge down to the company’s crews in order to keep them safe and healthy.

“When people first come into this industry, they don’t realize how really physical it is. And when you don’t take care of yourself, that’s what leads to accidents and injuries,” says Legendary’s Office Manager Suzannah Hall, who nominated Blair for the award. Hall adds that Blair is always educating employees about the importance of eating right and staying hydrated — especially while they’re out working in the hot, Georgia sun.



**COLLEAGUES WORDS:  
A FIVE-STAR FRIEND**

“Employees can sometimes have difficulties pop up, in terms of their personal lives... he helps the guys personally as well as professionally.

**He provides them friendship and a listening ear.”**

**DAN PLOURDE**, maintenance manager,  
Legendary Landscaping

“The man is a body builder, and I’ll say I’ve never seen a human rip more jeans than Sean.

**The man rips his jeans on a weekly basis.”**

**TOMMY BURSI**, owner,  
Legendary Landscaping

Blair says he initially noticed some employees getting fatigued easily, and relying on sugary, caffeinated beverages to get through the day.

“A lot of the guys think that it’s fuel, and that’s not the case,” Blair says. “I try to explain to the guys that to be happier, healthier employees you’ve got to be hydrated, and you’ve got to be well-rested, and all these things that will make you better at your job.”

But it took a while to get people on board. Blair says he had to get out there with them and get his hands dirty to show them what making the right choices could do for them.

“Initially, I had a lot of pushback,” Blair says. “You could tell everyone was thinking, ‘What does this guy know?’ but, when I have to grab a shovel, I’m not getting tired and I’m able to perform better. The guys noticed that. I’ve had conversations one-on-one with them and say ‘I’m drinking water. I’m eating properly...I’m not smoking four packs of cigarettes a day.’ All these little things on just being healthy, they allow me to do more.”

Once crews saw how well Blair was able to perform the tough, demanding jobs, they started to come around. Some even have such a desire to get healthier that they’re willing to put in the time outside of work.

“I’ve had several guys ask me about it, and I’ve had some start going to the gym. Some stopped carrying around a 12-pack of Coke and got a case of water,” Blair says. “Things like that have helped productivity with a lot of guys.”

And those aren’t the only measures Blair’s taking to make things better for employees, he’s also updating Legendary’s employee handbook.

“It was one of those things that needed to get done, so I just put my mind to it,” he says. “It’s really about what we can do to make onboarding easier. If they have a clearer vision of what we’re trying

to do, then I think it’s easier for them to transition and become part of the team.”

**LEADING THROUGH SERVICE.** For Blair, making sure his crews are healthy and performing at their best isn’t all about the bottom line; he genuinely cares about them and wants them to succeed. And he hopes they know that.

“I think from a caring for people perspective, if someone feels you care about them — they’re going to be willing to work harder and be more understanding,” he says. “If someone feels appreciated, they won’t just halfway do something — they’re going to try and do their best job.”

Blair says it’s the little things, like just being positive, that have a big impact.

“I always try and start the day fresh and in a good mood and in high spirits to set the pace for the day,” he says. “If you come in and are already negative, then you’re just going to have a terrible day. That’s why I try to say, ‘Good morning’ and ‘Do you have everything you need?’ and approach it as a way that I’m trying to serve and help them as opposed to barking orders or things like that.”

Legendary’s Maintenance Manager, Dan Plourde, says he saw just how effective Blair’s leadership was right when he started with the company last November.

“He was very helpful in terms of getting me acclimated to the company,” Plourde says of Blair. “He’s very accommodating and was always willing to help me adjust to the new job.”

Plourde spent his first few weeks riding around in Blair’s truck and learning the ropes. He says he noticed how communicative Blair was with the crews and how he was always there to listen to any problems they had — on the job or otherwise.

“Employees can sometimes have difficulties pop up, in terms of their personal lives, and he just listens and helps them

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along,” he says. “He helps the guys personally as well as professionally. He provides them friendship and a listening ear.”

Blair recognizes this allows him to better connect with his crews, so resolution can be found faster if problems arise.

“Sometimes hard situations come up and you have to be a stickler or an unmovable rock, but a lot of the times, compromise is what makes the world go around,” he says.

Bursi says all of this has contributed to Blair becoming such an integral part of the day-to-day operations at Legendary.

“At the end of the day, when I have Sean handle a situation, I know he’s going to work hard, handle it the best he can and do the right thing,” Bursi adds. “When you’re growing and developing a business and a brand, it’s such a relief to have somebody like that.”

**COOL, CALM AND COLLECTED.** Blair’s co-workers say his easy-going nature is another reason why he’s a great asset.

“He’s empathetic and kind, and just exudes joy and happiness,” Hall says. “You can’t be in a bad mood around Sean. He’s very easy to be around. You never know if he’s in a good mood, bad mood, or whatever because he always has a great, big smile on his face.”

Plourde says Blair’s calm disposition is the trait he admires most.

“Whenever a crisis occurs, such as a crew truck breaking down on the road, he approaches the problem calmly and systematically to help find a solution,” he says. “Even if it is not his crew, he will jump in to assist everyone involved.”

Hall adds Blair’s ability to remain unraveled really showed last year during a difficult situation. “I was completely frustrated, and Tommy was too, but I never saw it in Sean until that situation resolved itself,” she recalls. “And then he let out this huge sigh of relief. He just doesn’t ever let the bad show.”

Bursi says that Blair’s work ethic and personality has spread throughout the company.

“Sean has a positive attitude and he’s



When Sean Blair isn’t working or in the gym, he says his favorite thing to do is spend time with his fiancée, Kristen.

goal-oriented and growth-oriented,” he says. “He wants to do good work. He’s not trying to cut corners and he’s preaching to the guys that you’ve got to do a good job in the right amount of time.”

**IN IT FOR THE LONG HAUL.** Blair says he has no plans of giving up the green industry anytime soon.

“I love the physicality of it,” he says. “I tried the whole sit at a desk thing, and it wasn’t for me... I’m a very hands-on guy. This job is great because it lets me get in the mix with the guys every day. It’s always

changing and there are always new challenges to overcome. It keeps it from getting dull and boring.”

He adds he’s eager to see what the future holds for the business.

“We are set to have our best year yet,” Blair says. “We’ve grown tremendously since I’ve started four years ago, and I feel like we’re on the upswing. I foresee us continuing to grow.”

And with Blair by his side, Bursi too is looking forward to the future.

“I hope that we get to continue to work together for years to come,” he says. **L&L**



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**ALEX HEFFELMIRE • J. STACY LANDSCAPING**  
2021 EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR



Alex Heffelmire knows what it's like to work at a desk. He's glad he's back outside.

BACK  
WHERE  
HE BELONGS



By Jimmy Miller

**ALEX HEFFELMIRE** and his brother grew up on 2,000 acres of farmland and tended to corn, beans, wheat and the various Belgian draft horses that wandered the property.

So, when Heffelmire wrapped up his time in the military and wasn't sure what was next, it seemed like a no-brainer to start a landscaping company with his brother. He didn't expect it would grow so big — and he didn't anticipate being bought out. So, when he was forced into another transition in his life, he landed in an unfamiliar spot: behind a desk.

For four years, he worked at an insurance agency, but his resume remained online. That's when Jeremy Stacy, the owner of J. Stacy Landscaping in Carmel, Indiana, dialed Heffelmire's number and told him it was time to come back outside.

"I love being outside. I love learning new things, learning all the new plants, especially in different areas," Heffelmire says. "I'm a very business-minded guy, so being able to run companies, operate them, manage them, has been something that's always been my knack."

**AT A CROSSROADS.** Heffelmire says that while he was figuring out what to do with his career, Stacy was at a similar crossroads with his company. Stacy and his wife, Stephanie, had founded the company in 2005, though Stacy was handling jobs as an AP Physics teacher at a nearby high school as well as leading his own company.

About seven years into owning the company, Stacy and his operation manager decided to part ways, leaving the quality of work — and, to some degree, the company — in jeopardy.

It was in the middle of the season, so finding somebody to fill that role was particularly tricky as the best in the industry had already landed positions for the summer. At one point, he was making plans to liquidate the company entirely.

Stacy calls it a "miracle" and a "Hail Mary" on Indeed that two days after initially posting, he found Heffelmire's contact information.

"Knowing Jeremy, who's one of my best friends in the

world now, I'm sure it was an extremely difficult time for him," Heffelmire says. "Do I throw away 10 years' worth of hard work or am I going to be able to find somebody?"

Now, Stacy and Heffelmire have a saying that in everything they go through, things seem to work themselves out. "I just happened to be around at the right time," Heffelmire says. "I honestly never regretted the decision (to leave my office job) at all. It's been the best opportunity of my life in terms of waking up, getting up and being excited to get out. Work is an escape. It's something that I really enjoy doing."

Four years after hiring Heffelmire, J. Stacy Landscaping has opened a new facility and doubled its revenue from that turbulent time. Stacy says at this point, he looks at Heffelmire as another owner. Heffelmire will even make recommendations to Stacy and say "your company," and Stacy says he has to remind Heffelmire that it's "our company."

"The hardest part of finding an operations manager is finding someone who treats the company like their own without their name on the truck," Stacy says. "He's my best friend. He's part of my family."

His wife and co-founder, Stephanie, agrees.

"Jeremy was so blessed when he met Alex and it immediately was a perfect fit," she says. "(Alex) shares the same vision (as Jeremy) and works hard and diligently to be the very best."

**OUT IN THE FIELD.** Andrew Huntsman believes he's found the best boss he's ever had in Heffelmire. Case in point: When Huntsman was working on a property and trimmed bushes he shouldn't have, Heffelmire didn't scream and shout. He didn't publicly ridicule Huntsman for the mistake. He simply waited until they returned to the office, where they had a brief and calm meeting about it. He's seen Heffelmire take up the same level of patience with others.

"If it's on the jobsite, he'll pull me aside to teach them how to do it more efficiently, or they'll pull them into the office to tell them to do things better this way," Huntsman says.



**ALEX HEFFELMIRE**  
J. STACY LANDSCAPING



**COLLEAGUES WORDS:  
MR. DEPENDABLE**

“The hardest part of finding an operations manager is finding someone who treats the company like their own without their name on the truck.

**He’s my best friend.  
He’s part of my family.”**

JEREMY STACY, J. Stacy Landscaping owner

“He treats everybody like family. As soon as you meet him, you’re pretty much friends...

**He’ll help anyone out any way he can.”**

ALEX HUNTSMAN, Heffelmire’s coworker



For Alex Heffelmire, his coworkers at J. Stacy Landscaping have become a second family to him.

Of course, this isn’t to say the expectations aren’t high. Huntsman says every detail has to be precisely correct before plants even go into the ground. Sometimes they’ll plant up to 70 in a day, but they have to look up to his standards before the crews start digging holes.

To help show what needs to be done, Heffelmire is one to also pick up a shovel and lead by example.

“He’s not afraid to get out in the field and do stuff,” Huntsman says.

Heffelmire admits it’s a cliché, but he wants to work in the field with his employees because it’s a matter of respect.

“The number one thing that I live my life is the Golden Rule,” he says. “Treat others as you would want to be treated yourself.”

**ALL ABOUT FAMILY.** When he’s not working outside, Heffelmire says he still finds himself doing something with his family outdoors. He and his wife, Danielle, recently purchased a camper, so their frequent camping and fishing trips are about to get a little more comfortable.

Danielle runs an auto repair shop now, and they both make time for their two children – nine-year-old Christian and six-year-old Landon. Heffelmire says he helps Christian manage some aggression issues stemming from autism, so work-life balance is especially important.

“Work is work, home is home,” he says. “We ask about one another’s days, but that’s about it. Let’s talk about our next camping adventure or things going on around the home.”



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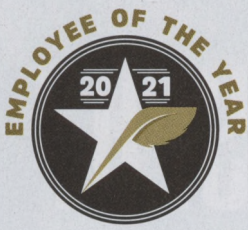
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**ALEX HEFFELMIRE**  
J. STACY LANDSCAPING

Heffelmire remembers that when he was growing up on the farm, his dad seemed very black-and-white about the work-life relationship: When you're at work, you're focused solely on work so that when you're at home, you can focus solely on your family. This is why Heffelmire's dedicated to his work, even when the going gets tough.

"It was work comes first, we've got to get things done so we can provide for our family. Whether you're seeing it or not, this is what puts food on the table," he says. "We always want to do better for our children than what we had. You just kind of keep it in your mind that (hard work is) not necessarily for you, it's for them."

**A FOUND FOUNDATION.** Heffelmire says

it's hard to envision ever leaving J. Stacy Landscaping: His loyalty to Jeremy and the company is strong.

That seems to be apparent at all levels of the company, as Huntsman remembers one winter where Heffelmire stepped in and helped Huntsman manage 50-60 properties that season.

"He treats everybody like family. As soon as you meet him, you're pretty much friends," Huntsman says. "He'll help anyone out any way he can."

It's not just employees at J. Stacy who are treated like family: Heffelmire says he prides himself on building solid relationships with clients. If they're looking to build a new patio for instance, Heffelmire won't simply ask "how big" and

"how much." He'll ask them what types of social gatherings they envision on the patio; do they want to keep it open or closed and more.

"I feel like if you don't do something other than just show up and give them a cost... that's everybody's spiel," he says.

Heffelmire says he's incredibly fortunate to have stumbled into J. Stacy Landscaping. Though he and J. Stacy Landscaping found one another at unique crossroads in their journey, things have certainly seemed to work themselves out.

"I don't think I'll ever leave Jeremy," he says. "It's the way he treats people at his company, the way that we treat people like family. Whether you're Mr. Roberts or Mr. Jacobs, you're family to us." **L&L**

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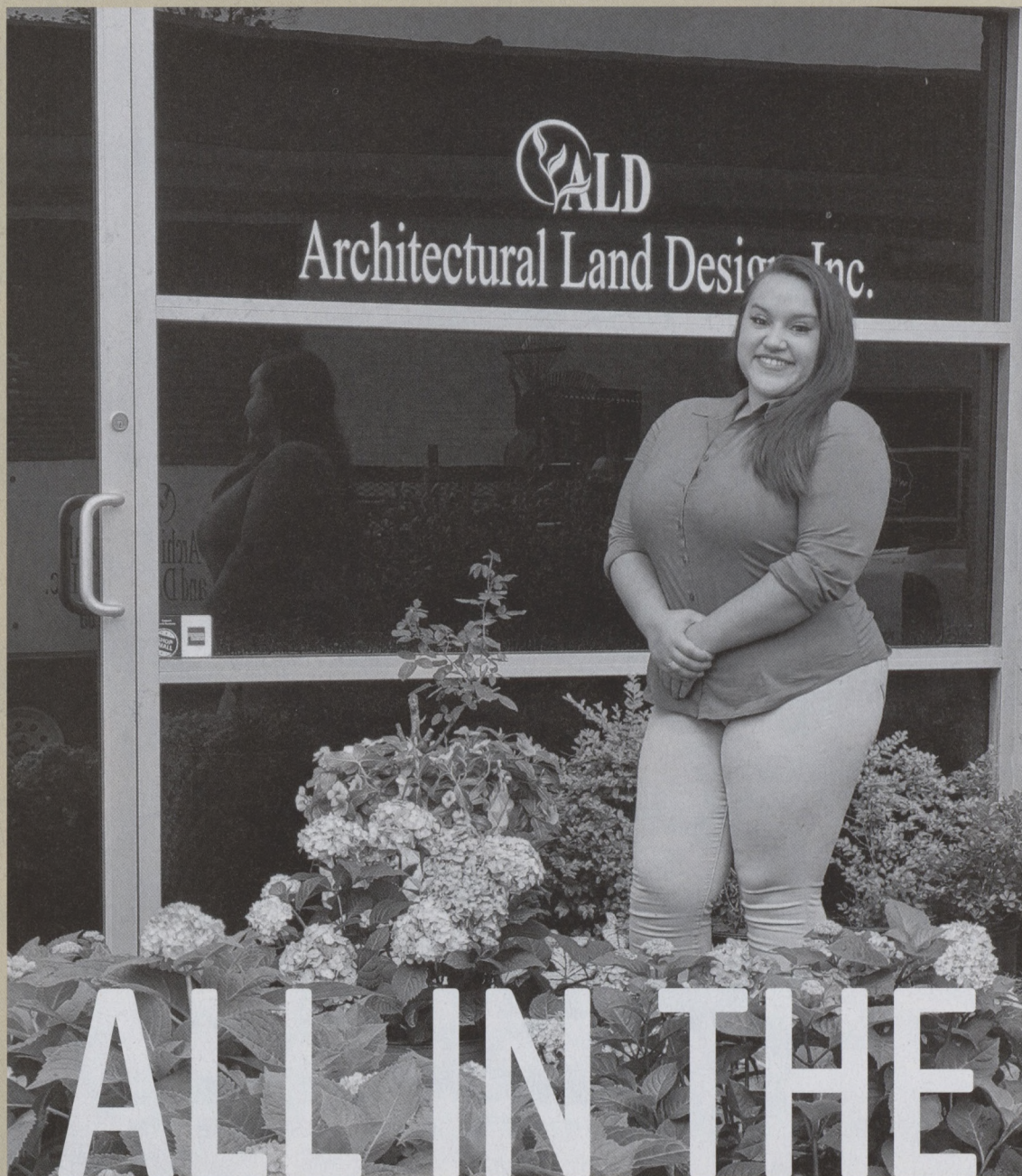


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**LAUREN MORALES** • ARCHITECTURAL LAND DESIGN

2021 EMPLOYEE OF THE YEAR



ALL IN THE  
**FAMILY**



Lauren Morales has handled all sorts of jobs at Architectural Land Design, but they all require a keen focus on getting things right.

**By Jimmy Miller**

**WHEN LAUREN MORALES** joined Architectural Land Design nearly a decade ago, the Houston native was simply trying to find a way to help her family. She adopted her company, just a 15-minute drive from her childhood home, as another family in the process.

She was 17 years old when she first landed a job with ALD, where she's been a receptionist, bookkeeper, office manager and project manager, the role she currently has out in the field with her crew. She first joined because her mother had been in a major car accident and could no longer work, which motivated Morales to jump on securing part-time work.

She found an ALD listing on Craigslist for an open receptionist position, but they ended up bringing her on as a full-time employee instead. Morales was quickly convinced that amidst a scary time in her life, she had landed at the right spot.

"It was definitely stressful, but I was ready for the challenge," Morales says. "Even at ALD, we stand by family as number one. It's a mom-and-pop company. It first started with a mother and son, so we've always had strong family values here."

**GROWING UP QUICKLY.** Naomi Valdez has often wondered if her daughter is an "old soul."

"She needed to be the breadwinner, which of course made me feel bad, but we were stuck," Valdez says of Morales. "She's been working since she was about 10 years old. Always been an honors student, always had perfect attendance, always trying to be number



**COLLEAGUES WORDS:  
STELLAR STUDENT**

"(She's) always been an honors student, always had perfect attendance, always trying to be number one but not in a conceited way.

**Everything she touches turns to gold."**

NAOMI VALDEZ, mother

"She has created a warm environment for growth amongst those she works with.

**Her multi-faceted nature has enabled her to be an asset."**

GARY ANDREAS, ALD owner



**LAUREN MORALES**  
ARCHITECTURAL LAND DESIGN

one but not in a conceited way. Everything she touches turns to gold.”

Valdez remembers Morales tending to their family gardens growing up, trying to grow tomatoes, jalapenos and – Morales’s favorite — roses. Even when the plants wouldn’t quite cooperate the way she had hoped, Valdez says Morales was determined to figure out ways to make them blossom.

It’s this same determination that got Morales inducted into the National Honor Society in high school and earned her several perfect attendance awards as a student. She attended Lone Star College for certifications in business management and is taking Harvard classes now toward a business degree.

“Especially with starting fresh out of high school, really absorbing everything has been a continual challenge in a good way,” Morales says. “Being that it’s a small firm, I’ve been able to wear multiple hats. Being 17, I was really young. I had to learn business management, team building, sales and even the basics of QuickBooks data entry. I have had to learn many, many skills, and it’s all been self-taught.”

**THE RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS.** Morales says there were two things she noticed right away in working with her crews: first, everyone else at the company is male – she’s the only female on the ALD payroll; second, many of the employees spoke Spanish, which Morales could

hardly speak at all when she first started at the company.

Morales says she hasn’t experienced any sort of major issues in directing men (she’s leading eight this season), especially since she emphasized creating a strong relationship with each individual when she first became a manager. Small details like buying the crews new socks or gloves go a long way toward building those relationships, Morales says.

Her boss, Gary Andreas, says Morales has even purchased meals and hygienic supplies for her crews, investing in their lives on a nearly daily basis.

“She has created a warm environment for growth amongst those she works with,” Andreas wrote on his nomination form.

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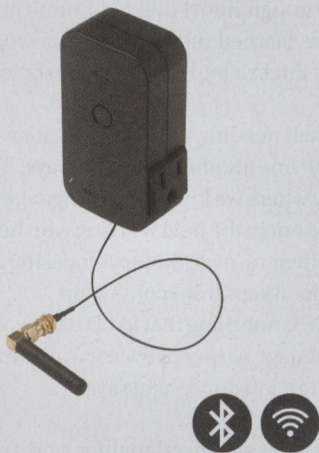
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"Her multi-faceted nature has enabled her to be an asset to the business and her peers."

Of course, the language barrier that existed also caused some complications. Her parents knew Spanish growing up, and she took Spanish in high school, but Morales did not consider herself bilingual until she self-taught herself the intricacies of the language on the job.

Valdez says she is fluent in Spanish, as were her late mother (Morales's grandmother) and Morales's father, so she wasn't surprised to find that her daughter picked up the language with so much ease.

"She's like a sponge and she enjoys learning more and more and more and more and never stops," Valdez says.

But it was mainly through nonverbal communication with employees where Morales learned industry-specific words, and they taught each other the English and Spanish translations simply by pointing at an object.

"When I found myself needing to communicate with my team, we were able to feed off one another," Morales says. "We were able to collaborate in a way where we know body language is universal."

As long as Morales is out in the field working with her employees, she feels she's gained their respect. She says focusing on the details helps prevent any major issues from coming up.

"Leading by example is one thing that (ALD has) really taught me, and just not to let a language barrier or even if you're male or female get in the way of getting a job done," she says.

**OUTSIDE OF WORK.** Valdez says her daughter works relentlessly at ALD because she feels so attached to it. In many ways, she's grown up with the company — at a time when she needed the work most, Morales found a business that turned into a family.

On July 11, she will have been with the company for exactly a decade. Andreas says Morales aims to become a partner in the company by the end of this year.

"That's as if it were her own baby or her own company," Valdez says. "She's been there so long, it's like her blood now."

That's not to say Morales doesn't have other interests outside of work, though many of them still relate to the green industry. She's known to put in well over 40 hours of work at the company, but outside of ALD, she also found a way to remain connected to the outdoors while also giving back.

This is through the Tomball Community Garden, where they grow plenty of organic produce that gets donated to a local foodbank.

Plus, Morales continues to educate herself on the various facets of the green industry outside of work hours. Valdez says she's seen her daughter trying to learn some basics of pool maintenance and irrigation repair.

Meanwhile, Morales says she's always seeking continued education outside of work hours to find new ways to help out.

"I've always been connected with nature," Morales says, "but joining ALD at 17 really enabled me to get more in depth with it." **L&L**

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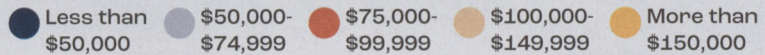
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## Hiring influences

In the April issue of *Lawn & Landscape*, we ran our 2021 Grow the Market report. The report focuses on why landscapers and LCOs are hired, fired and gathers information on how homeowners perceive the industry. The results are based on 576 homeowners. Throughout the year, we'll publish more information from the report. This month, we focus on what motivated homeowners to hire a professional. To read the full report, visit [bit.ly/2021gtm](https://bit.ly/2021gtm).

### RESPONDENTS' INCOME → 6=extremely influential; 0=not at all influential



#### HOW INFLUENTIAL ARE THE FOLLOWING AS MOTIVATIONS TO HAVE A LAWN MAINTENANCE CONTRACTOR DO THE MOWING, TRIMMING AND EDGING OF YOUR LAWN?

Keeps yard looking better than I/we could	5.2	4.6	4.8	4.9	5.1
Well-manicured lawn adds value to home	5.1	4.7	4.6	5	4.1
Most neighbors use a contractor	3.7	3.3	3.4	4.5	4
Have other things to do instead of yard work	3.5	2.8	3.9	4.2	3.9
I/we dislike yard work	3.1	3.5	3	3.7	3.3
Health issues that keeps me/us from doing work	3.4	3.3	3.2	3.2	1.8

#### HOW INFLUENTIAL ARE THE FOLLOWING AS MOTIVATIONS TO HAVE A LAWN CARE CONTRACTOR APPLY THE FERTILIZER, WEED KILLER AND/OR INSECT CONTROL PRODUCTS?

Knows what products work best in my yard	4.9	5	5.1	5.4	5.4
Gets better results than I/we ever could	4.8	4.3	5	5.3	5.2
Has access to more products than I/we do	4.4	4.7	5	4.6	5.1
Have other things to do instead of yard work	4	3.4	3.8	4.7	4.5
Prefer not to be in contact with chemicals	4.1	3.7	3.5	4.6	4.2
Most neighbors use a contractor	3.6	3.2	3.3	4.7	4.4
I/we dislike yard work	3.1	3.8	3	3.8	3.3
Health issues that keeps me/us from doing work	3	2.7	3	3.3	1.7

#### HOW INFLUENTIAL ARE THE FOLLOWING AS MOTIVATIONS TO IMPROVE YOUR HARDSCAPE?

The ability to enjoy the outside space	4.5	4.6	4.7	4.6	4.8
A sense of personal pride	4.3	4.6	4.6	4.5	4.7
Adding to the home value	4.3	4.4	4.5	4.7	4.5
Having an outdoor entertainment area	3.8	3.9	4.1	4.6	4.4
Fitting in with neighbors, meeting expectations	2.8	3	3.4	3.5	3.5



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**When a backyard** is the home office view and the outdoors is a reimagined vacationland, services like lawn care become even more important to customers.

By **Kristen Hampshire**

# Always on



their minds

**MORE MONEY TO SPEND.** With people staying at home more, they are spending less on traveling and more on improving their own backyards.

“My yard is full of weeds. Help!”

This is the most common lawn care service request when a new client calls Clean Cut Landscape Design, Maintenance & Lighting in Lancaster, Pa. “The other one is, ‘I want my yard to look like my next-door neighbor’s yard,’” says Aaron Raabe, who co-owns the firm with Jim Mellinger.

Lawn care is a growing service for Clean Cut, and Raabe points to a couple of reasons for an increase in demand. “Where we live, our demographic is at least half 60 (year olds) and up, so you get the customer who decides they don’t want to care for their lawn anymore or can’t do it anymore,” he says.

Clean Cut only mows for customers who sign on for other services, such as a lawn care program or tree and shrub services. For those who just wish the dandelions would go away (another popular demand), Raabe focuses on educating clients first so they understand what’s involved in taking a lawn from a weed patch to a healthy green.

“We explain the process, the steps we take, the applications,” Raabe says, noting that this further grabs their interest. Education helps sell the service, set expectations and, ultimately, grow a business because clients view you as a trusted resource.

And with more people working from

home during the pandemic, there’s more attention on the lawn and landscape — including large-scale projects like outdoor kitchens, patio living spaces and pools. “The momentum has continued and only increased,” says Neave Group Outdoor Solutions’ Glen Baisley, noting that reduced travel and more time at home has resulted in a budget and desire for backyard beautification projects.

“In general, people are putting more into services than ever before, too,” adds Baisley, the company’s marketing and customer service director. “People who typically might have wanted weekly lawn maintenance and didn’t necessarily take on a turf healthcare package are wanting the whole gamut of services because they want their properties to look as best as possible. They are looking out the window all the time and that is what they are seeing.”

**BUDGETING FOR A BETTER VIEW.** Business has been healthy during the pandemic, at times even exceeding expectations, as Baisley says. People are asking for pools, fire pits, entertainment spaces and gardens. “They want a personal backyard paradise or their own vacation getaway in their backyard,” he says.

Michael Kaylor is seeing the same trend in Virginia, where he operates Kaylor Lawns and Landscaping. “We have had more calls than we can handle for patios and hardscaping projects like retaining walls,” he says. “We are as slammed as we’ve ever been.” Kaylor has even turned down mowing requests from his clients, who live where he’s based in Christiansburg and Blacksburg.

But what about lawn care specifically?

Are customers just as interested in a healthy, weed-free lawn as they are a patio entertainment space? How does the demand for lawn care services in 2021 compare to how other landscaping services are performing?

That depends on the customer demographic, location and clients’ budgets, too. As Raabe says, his area of Pennsylvania which includes lots of newly developed farmland tends to have an older demographic. They’re willing to spend on lawn care and let someone else handle the tasks.

Another interesting market dynamic for Raabe that’s driving lawn care business is a result of the soil-rich farmland. Developers tend to strip and sell the valuable soil before building, which basically lays the groundwork for him to sell lawn care. “Commercial construction companies come and take the topsoil and then someone like me has to work with junk soil,” he says. “For customers who want grass, I walk them through the process and explain it’s a long game.”

Freed-up budget dollars have prompted some homeowners to spend where they might not have before. “The percentage of income goes toward things you might not have cared about before,” Kaylor says. “Maybe they’re not commuting and buying lunch out every day, so they have extra disposable income to put toward their property vs. their car or meals out.”

Kaylor says the debt relief and stimulus dollars many homeowners have received during the last year has given them more expendable income to say yes to big projects. So, in his area, he’s seeing more of an interest in projects that residents might have been dreaming of and put on hold vs. services like lawn care. “With people at

“...If you’re sitting at home at a desk and you see the neighbor’s lawn is rich green and yours isn’t, you might say, **I have to do something about this.**”

AARON RAABE, co-owner, Clean Cut Landscape Design, Maintenance & Lighting



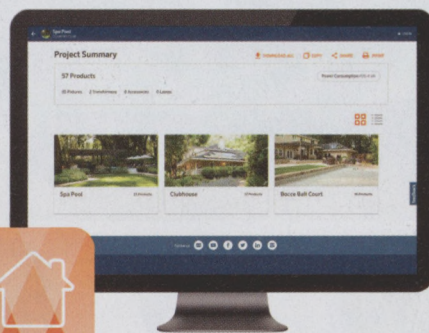
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“We have had more calls than we can handle for patios and hardscaping... We are as slammed as we’ve ever been.”

MICHAEL KAYLOR, owner, Kaylor Lawns & Landscaping

home, they want an outdoor space where they can spend time,” he says.

When an office view is a backyard rather than a white wall or parking lot of an office building, there’s naturally more attention on a home’s outdoors.

“If you’re leaving for work at an office at 7 a.m. and coming home at 7 p.m., you might not care how green your grass is,” Raabe says. “But if you’re sitting at home at a desk and you see the neighbor’s lawn is rich green and yours isn’t, you might say, ‘I have to do something about this.’”

Overall, his customer base is demanding lawn care even though they are home and perhaps available to do it themselves because perhaps they’ve attempted it and achieving desired results wasn’t as easy as they thought. “They realize, ‘I don’t want to do that again,’” he says.

**ADDING IN-DEMAND SERVICES.** Clients are taking suggestions for improving their properties, Baisley adds. “While we have always made suggestions that lead to a better long-term impact on their landscape and increased curbside value, now clients are more on board because they are at home spending more time,” he says.

While weeds are the top lawn care complaint that drives residents to inquire about a lawn care program, Neave Group Outdoor Solutions has noticed more request for plant healthcare and tree healthcare. “We can make suggestions about which plants are going to thrive and which ones will be the most easily treated, or vice-versa,” he says.

Another in-demand service this season is tick and mosquito control with a special concern for ticks. “We are really anticipat-

ing a bad tick season, and then as we go into summer, we’ll get more requests for mosquito,” Baisley says.

Raabe is anticipating greater weed pressure from nutsedge in his region, “which is a challenging grassy weed to take care of,” he says, figuring it will probably cause more people to call for help. “Also, we’ve seen an increase in aeration and overseeding services.”

This could be attributed to educating customers, he says. “As a smaller company, we spend time with customers discussing the different options,” he says.

Continuing into 2021, business is going strong with an uptick in lawn care. “We absolutely have seen a spike in services,” Baisley says. “That includes from new clients and requests from existing customers who want more services.” **L&L**

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# Not going

A photograph of a spotted deer grazing in a yard. The deer is the central focus, with its head down eating grass. The background is a blurred green lawn and trees. The text is overlaid on the image.

Your customers' yards  
will continue to see more deer  
as the population continues to grow.

# anywhere

By John Torsiello

According to a recent Cornell University Integrated Deer Research and Management study, the population of white-tailed deer in the U.S. has soared from around a half-million in the early 1900s to around 25 million today. Densities of white-tailed deer may exceed 40 deer per square mile in some rural areas, and over 100 deer per-square-mile have been documented near many eastern metropolitan areas.

This is all good news for animal lovers and, well, the deer, but not so good for homeowners in many parts of the country who are seeing their valuable landscaping decimated by deer.

**URBAN ENCROACHMENT.** According to Michael Gaunya, president of American Deer Proofing, problems with deer foraging in the past would have been “mostly rural.” However, with urban encroachment and ever-growing deer populations, “we are now getting calls from everywhere,” he says. “When you see a deer on the side of the road, it’s not really novel any longer. It’s more commonplace.”

Gaunya believes the Bambi Boomer explosion is a result of several key factors. “First, with less hunting and less natural predators, deer are over populating. Second, from what we see specializing in the deer repellent business for over 20 years, deer are less fearful of humans. We have customers telling us deer are up on their porches and decks, even looking in their windows. We have a few customers for whom we spray planters on their decks. That is something we really haven’t dealt with in the past.”

Sean McNamara, owner of Great Oak, says, “More and more mayors and first selectmen across the country are having to deal with complaints about gardens being destroyed and other deer-related issues. There is a growing battle between those that want the local deer population culled by professional hunters versus people that are against hunting the deer.”

Continuing, McNamara says the deer problem is “mainly worse” in the suburbs



Even though some species of trees and shrubs may be described as “deer resistant,” if populations are high enough, deer can still do damage.

around major cities. “This was farmland 100 years ago. When all the trees were chopped down for agriculture, there were very few deer. Now that the woodlands have returned, it is perfect habitat for deer. They have cover, food and no predators. We are seeing an increase in deep populations in the suburbs around all the major cities across the country except the Southwest.”

**DOING DAMAGE.** Foraging deer, Gaunya says, keep his crew hopping even during the winter months. “Deer do not typically eat the same plants in the summer as they do in the winter. Winter months see plants like arborvitae and rhododendron getting destroyed from the ground up to about five feet.”

During the summer, deer develop a different pallet, if you will. Hosta, roses, many different varieties of flowers come under their noses and in their mouths. “We have been tracking deer and their movements for almost 20 years,” Gaunya says. “We are now seeing deer smaller in size, probably due to the pressure of urban development, but higher deer populations because of less hunting and milder winters. Back in the 1990s when our company started, the

damage was closer to six feet in height. The larger the deer, the higher up they can feed.”

Gaunya says damage being wrought by deer to landscaping and crops, as well as causing car accidents and serving as catalysts for Lyme disease, is in the billions. “The amount of money spent to spray, fence, cover, you name it, to guard against deer foraging is immense,” he says.

McNamara says from around Thanksgiving to the middle of April, deer will eat ever-green trees and shrubs when no other food is available. Arborvitae, hemlock, pine, rhododendrons, azaleas, holly and many other plants are susceptible to winter deer browsing damage. Plants that are often thought of as “deer resistant” will be browsed when the population gets high enough. Their favorite winter plants are yews, euonymus, arborvitae, rhododendron and azaleas.

“The damage they do can run into the thousands and even tens of thousands of dollars on some properties,” McNamara says. “It also has altered the plants landscapers are willing to plant in high deer population areas. The trend for 30 years in Fairfield County, Connecticut, has been to only plant things that are truly deer

“Deer do not typically eat the same plants in the summer as they do in the winter.”

MICHAEL GAUNYA, president, American Deer Proofing

resistant, such as boxwood, dwarf Alberta spruce and andromeda. We have planted so many boxwoods in Fairfield County that there has been an explosion in the pests that go after these plants. Boxwood leaf miner, psyllid, mites and andromeda lace bug are all on the rise. You get rid of one problem, (like) the deer, and you invite a dozen more.”

Gaunya says, “Don’t get me wrong, I love deer, I really do. They are beautiful animals. Deer can be taught to stay off or not to eat non-indigenous plants that we introduce to an area. If you can figure out a way to train without a fear deterrent, such as blood or urine or needing the animal to try the plant, thus causing damage before they decide it’s something they do not like, you will have something.”

Gaunya adds deer will not eat something

they cannot digest, which he says his product will train deer to think.

McNamara encourages landscapers to use “the full pallet” of plants, along with his deer repellent, which is not available to homeowners. He adds that landscapers should be aware that during the growing season, deer leave evergreen trees and shrubs alone and turn their attention to annuals, perennials and deciduous shrubs. There is “really no need” to protect arborvitae and rhododendrons during the growing season.

The battle against marauding deer might not be one in which landscape professionals will ever claim total victory. But with the right repellents and thoughtful planting practices, they can save homeowners and commercial clients countless stress and money. **L&L**

The author is a freelancer based in Connecticut.



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**The pitch:** Kubota's new "crossover" LX Series compact tractor line bridges a gap between its B and L Series models.

- The LX Series offers three models, including the entry-level LX2610SU ROPS model and the LX2610 and LX3310.
- The LX Series is powered by Kubota diesel engines ranging from 24.9 to 30.8 gross engine horsepower.
- The LX Series provides a compact size that is capable of operating 60-inch and 72-inch mid-mount mowers, yet powerful enough for a wide-range of implements including a front loader, backhoe, front snow removal implements and rear implements like five-foot rotary cutters, box blades, tillers, post-hole diggers and more via a 3-point hitch.

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



## KIOTI CK2610SE HST CAB COMPACT TRACTOR

**The pitch:** Landscaping professionals can tackle tough jobs with ease with KIOTI's CK2610SE HST Cab compact tractor.

- Launched in 2020, the model features a 24.5 hp engine with hydrostatic transmission and a factory-installed cab with A/C and heat, plus a deluxe suspension seat that allows operators to perform tasks comfortably year-round.
- A Tier 4 compliant eco-friendly diesel engine combined with a premium cab offers operators powerful performance in a quieter environment.
- A standard rear three-point adjustment lever makes it easy to raise and lower the telescopic lower links and stabilizers from outside the tractor when attaching implements.

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





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## BOBCAT CT1025

**The pitch:** The CT1025 sub-compact tractor packs power into a small frame size to efficiently complete projects.

- It includes a limited Category 1 three-point hitch for using implements.
- The hydrostatic transmission offers clutch-free forward and reverse movement.
- It features a 25-hp diesel engine and four-wheel drive.

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



## SIMPLICITY'S LEGACY XL SUBCOMPACT TRACTOR

**The pitch:** Reliable power and dynamic capabilities in a subcompact package without skimping on the comfort features.

- Attachments include (but are not limited to): dozer blade, front-end loader, backhoe and powered rotary broom.
- It is equipped with a 33 gross hp Vanguard Big Block V-Twin engine with electronic fuel injection.
- Shift between 2WD and 4WD for on-demand power when needed.
- Users have a choice of a 52- or 61-inch deck.

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



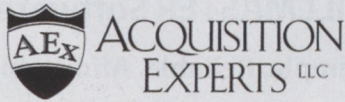
## STEINER 450 TRACTOR

**The pitch:** The Steiner 450 tractor is a versatile machine with its articulating and oscillating frame, hydraulic weight transfer, traction boost system and a powerful engine.

- The Steiner Rough Cut Mower attachment clears thick, overgrown, brush and grass and comes standard with durable caster wheels.
- This tool is designed to evenly cut through tall grass and heavy brush up to 1.5 inches in diameter.
- The Steiner 450 tractor and its attachments can tackle a wide array of tough projects.

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

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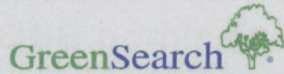
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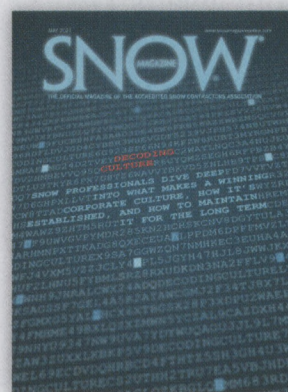
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# AN AVERAGE DAY

**Jason Cromley,**  
Owner, Hidden Creek Landscaping



Getting out of bed in the morning can sometimes be a difficult task, especially when a workout awaits. On those mornings when Jason Cromley, owner of Hidden Creek Landscaping in Columbus, Ohio, misses a morning workout, it doesn't take long to make up for the morning malaise.

Interviewed by **Brian Horn**

"If I skip a workout, I have regret all day and leave work early to get it in," he says.

**Here's what else Cromley squeezes in on an Average Day.**

I run and bike and strength train every day before work. I run Tuesdays and Thursdays for about 5 miles and stretch afterwards. It's approximately 45-60 minutes in total – strength train for about 30 minutes and then stretch afterwards. My coffee is my favorite part of my day after working out.

For breakfast it's a protein bar or shake plus a banana in the car. My commute is 5 miles so it's nice and short. I love upbeat, fast-paced music on my way to work.

I'll arrive around 7:15- 7:30 and then say hello to whoever is here and then head upstairs to my journal and email. I'll review my calendar and journal for upcoming day and tasks that need to be completed.

I try to pack a lunch every day, unless I have a lunch meeting. It's usually a sandwich, or carrots, or trail mix or pudding, or string cheese – same as when I was kid, I guess.

After-lunch tasks are never consistent here. I have a daily journal I use and it really helps me keep my day on track and get all my tasks done. It's by Michael Hyatt and has made a big difference in holding myself accountable!

I have approximately 4-6 meetings per day with varying responsibilities. We implemented an Entrepreneurial Operating System a year ago and it's very helpful when you follow an agenda that's always the same.

I did have to address my team to put phones away during meetings as they were constantly on them when the topic wasn't about them. Personally, I like my people to be able to respond quickly to clients, but they all need to set boundaries from the beginning of any new relationship. I need to teach all of team about upfront expectations so they can be aligned.

I'll leave around 5:30 p.m. and use that time mostly trying to catch up on calls. I'll mostly sit in my garage for 20 minutes trying to finish up calls, so I don't have to interrupt family time.

I go to bed around 11 p.m. every day and I mostly work up until the last 30 minutes before I go to sleep. I rarely work on weekends. If I do, it's mostly on Sunday trying to get prepared for the upcoming week. **L&L**



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**Technology enables businesses to move away from time-consuming manual processes and disconnected systems that hinder profits.”**

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**L**owball competitors. Labor shortages. Increased material costs and extended delivery times. The landscaping industry today faces plenty of challenges, and it's becoming harder and harder to get — and stay — ahead.

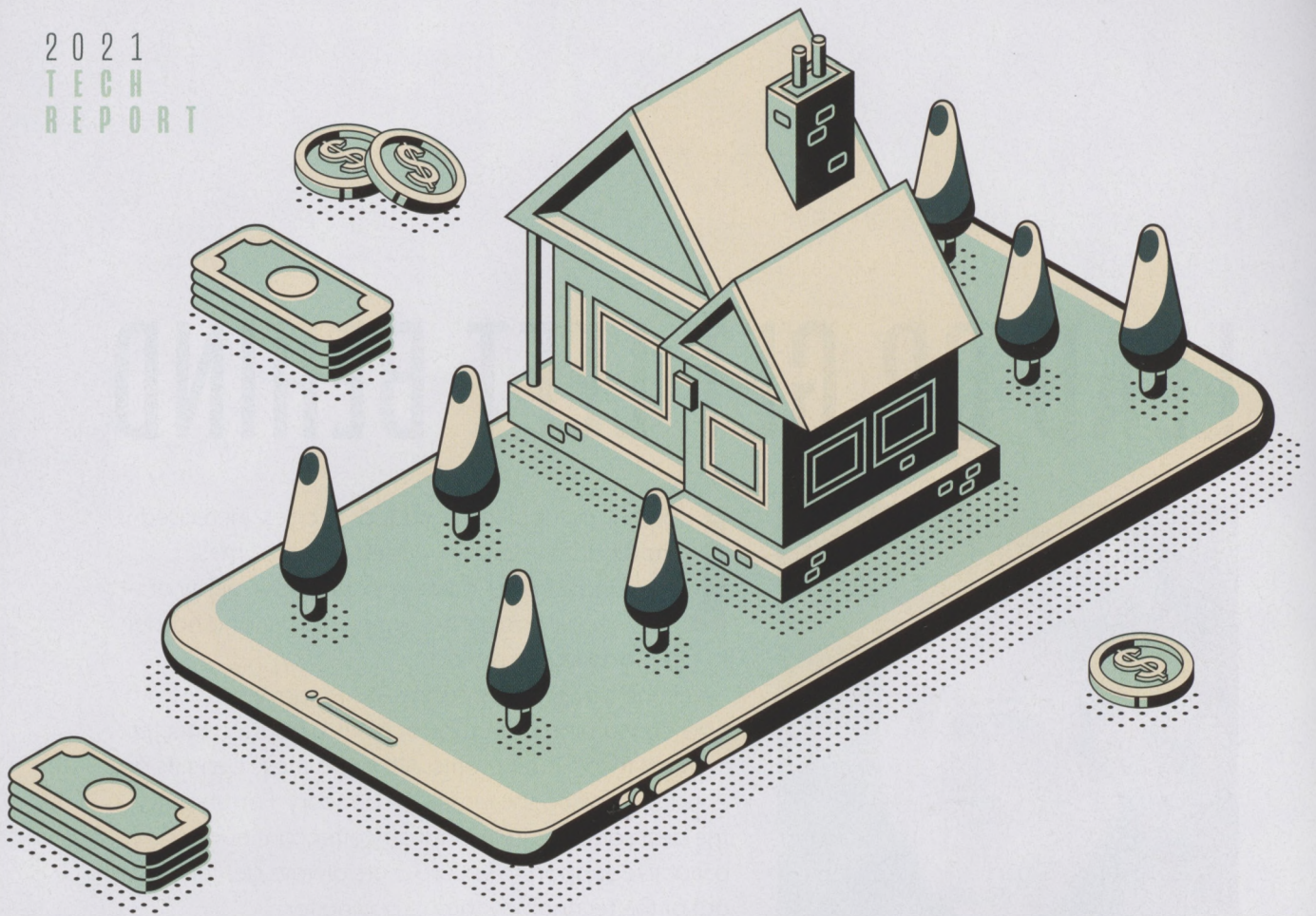
Technology enables businesses to move away from time-consuming manual processes and disconnected systems that hinder profits. Although these benefits are enticing, making the jump can be scary. Fortunately, the best solutions in the industry offer continual, proactive support to ensure users always get the most out of the technology they're paying for.

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**Mark Tipton**  
Founder and CEO  
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# TECH SPECS

In our inaugural technology report in 2018, 58% of landscapers said customers could pay for services online. In this report, that number jumps to 77%. That's a great sign that more customers are embracing technology to make their lives – and their customers' – easier.

Another area that shows the industry is embracing software more – when asked what types of technology they use at their company, 79% said mobile technology like smartphones and apps, which is a 42% increase from last year's report.

↓  
What was your 2020 revenue?

**26%**  
Under \$200,000

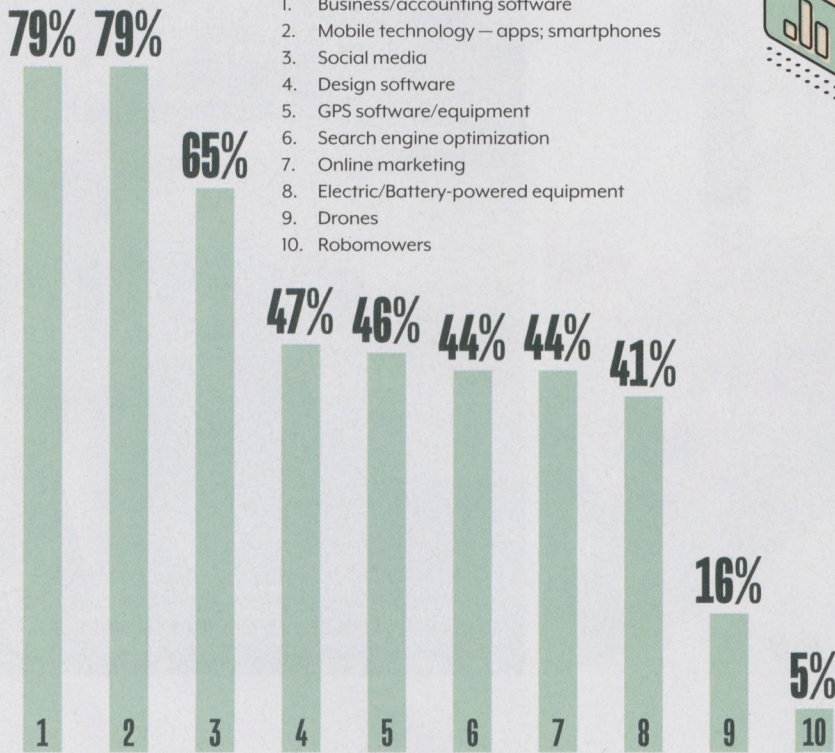
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**16%**  
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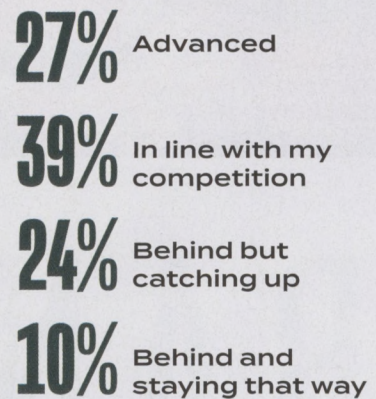
**16%**  
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## Which of the following do you use at your company?



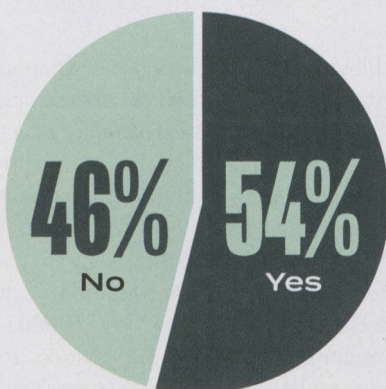
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3. Social media
4. Design software
5. GPS software/equipment
6. Search engine optimization
7. Online marketing
8. Electric/Battery-powered equipment
9. Drones
10. Robomowers

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



**ABOUT THIS SURVEY:** Lawn & Landscape surveyed readers in late April and early May. The results are based on approximately 150 respondents.

## Do you feel the technology or software you use as a company makes you more attractive to potential customers?



### Respondent Comments

- I don't think they notice how you do it as much as they notice what you do. The finished product is what they're focused on.
- As long as the work gets done and they get billed correctly, that's all the customer cares about.
- It seems like people are becoming more tech friendly and expect everyone around them to be as techy as them.
- I don't believe the buyer/customer necessarily associates our use of technology to their benefit?
- Clients are able to reach us in several ways, on their terms, and vice versa. Our CRM gives us insight into who our best client is and how to best serve them.
- Much more efficient, they feel good knowing we're minimizing impact on the planet.



Anne Roberts makes sure her team at Anne Roberts Gardens is comfortable using technology more in order to grow the business.



CJ Kowalke, left, owns Lawns & More. He and his brother-in-law, Miguel Salazar, are the only two full-time employees, so technology helps them work more efficiently.

# TRANSFORMAT

Technology can help a company run more efficiently and provide better services, and it doesn't have to be a costly investment. **By Kim Lux**

**J**ust a few years ago, Chris Duckworth, owner of Duck Works Lawn Care in Cobden, Ill., lost something very important. That's when he knew his dependence on paper needed to go.

"Paper got really ridiculous in my life and I was sick of it," he says. "I lost my calendar one day and realized that 100% of everything I had was in that calendar."

Not only was Duckworth losing track of things, but he was also having trouble

staying in contact with all his employees, which can get up to 20 during peak season. The company is expected to do just over \$700,000 in revenue in 2021.

"I needed to get information to another crew, and I was always writing everything down and for a guy who works with his hands, it doesn't feel very good to write a lot," he says.

"Through a need to really communicate better, we started using some apps and ba-

sic things that I could use instead of paper.

At Maldonado Nursery & Landscaping in San Antonio, Eric Greer, director of accounting and financial reporting, says the company is using technology more as it focuses on the future.

"We definitely believe that technology is critical to position ourselves for the growth we feel is coming," he says. "We are utilizing technology to secure information, so we can make good decisions. Greer says



↓  
42%

of respondents say their company depends on technology and software a lot more compared to five years ago.

Roberts also uses landscape-based software. “The CRM is a lot more than just a regular CRM,” she says. “It’s time tracking, it’s invoicing – it goes directly over to QuickBooks, which is nice – everything is centrally located and that’s really helpful.”

Efficiency is another reason Roberts says her business relies on technology.

“We use technology to be able to track all our time on our jobs individually, and we use it out in the field in terms of crews signing in and out of jobs and all of our payroll is directly tied into that program as well,” she says.

Even though his company is small, it’s just him and his brother-in-law in terms of full-time employees, CJ Kowalke says he went ahead and dove into the technology world to improve efficiency as well.

“When I started out, I was told by a lot of people, ‘You’re too small. Once you’re a bigger company it matters, but for small companies, technology isn’t worth it.’ But I’ve actually found the opposite to be true,” he says.

“I’m sure it’s important to larger companies but my time is even more important because I don’t have 20 guys out there bringing in income. It’s just two of us. The more efficient we can make ourselves – the more money we make.”

**WHAT’S WORTH THE EXPENSE?** Kowalke, who owns Lawns & More in Kendallville, Ind., uses a field-service software that he pays \$130 a month for it. Kowalke says his business is projected to do about \$200,000 in revenue this year.

# LIVE TECH

the company, which ranked #60 on this year’s Top 100 List, recently started using a new customer relationship management (CRM) software geared directly toward landscaping businesses.

“It allows us to manage our purchase order process better, and there’s revenue recognition, billing and all of those things,” he says. “It helps us to capture those costs critical to making sure we’re bidding work at a price point that’s profitable.”

Greer adds this is especially important when it comes to maintenance work.

“The margins are pretty thin and there tends to be a lot of competition in that

space, so we are always looking for data that helps us know what our costs are and then manage them better,” he says.

Anne Roberts, president of the Chicago-based Anne Roberts Gardens, says profitability is also her driving factor for prioritizing technology.

“It definitely helps in terms of bidding and making sure you’re bidding jobs properly,” she says. “When you go to bid the same job the following year, you can really look and see ‘did we bid this correctly? Did we perform at a profit?’ If not, the technology allows you to change your pricing, so that you are profitable.”

LAWN & LANDSCAPE PHOTO ILLUSTRATION

"The biggest thing I've learned with the technology, is you've got to pay to play," he says. "We tried some free versions. I got very frustrated with them and thought they weren't worth the hassle, so I just gave up on them."

Kowalke acknowledges that some smaller companies may be hesitant to make the monthly investments. "It can be a little bit daunting," he says, mentioning it's worth every penny. "My only regret is I didn't do it sooner."

Roberts says finding technology that fits the right price point was also important for her, and adds she was more inclined to go with a subscription-based model, where you aren't committed for the long-haul.

"What I like about what we use, is that it's affordable," she says. "It's a monthly subscription, so you don't have a big upfront cost. A lot of other companies you have to pay \$8,000 to \$20,000 just to get in, and then they want a percentage of your sales, too."

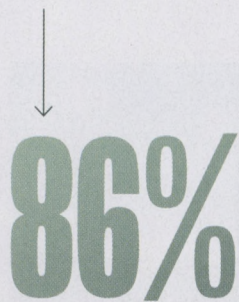
According to Roberts, the most important thing to keep in mind when selecting a software, or any type of technology, is how will it grow with your company over time? Will you have to continue replacing it as you scale up?

"My advice would be don't buy more than you really need and get a system that you can grow into, and add and utilize more," she says. "At some point, we're probably going to have to get into something bigger, but for now I've used it for many years, and it's been keeping up with us."

For most of his technology needs, Duckworth prefers to go in the opposite direction — and sticks with free or low-cost choices.

"The margins in lawn care aren't great, especially, in southern Illinois, so I didn't have a lot of money to spend," he says. "So, I had to find something that was free. The ones I've paid for have been the least productive for me, and I think it's because they're too advanced. I don't have time to sit down and learn the whole thing, and then if I can't figure it out in a short time, I don't have time to train everyone on how to use it."

Duckworth did his research and attended a few virtual events and through



of respondents say their companies budget between 0%–5% for software expenses.

that he learned how to start utilizing free, online spread sheets with his crews.

"They clock in and out of each yard through it. So, we can see in real time where they are and where they've been," he says. "That was the other thing about before, when we were just writing everything, I couldn't ever find them. Obviously if they are working, they won't be answering their phone, so I'd drive to a yard and they wouldn't be there, I'd drive to another and they weren't there either...I'd try to get ahead of them and I'd still miss them, and it got very frustrating."

To outfit his employees with all these free apps, Duckworth says each crew has its own cellphone with all of them downloaded to it. "My foreman keeps his phone," Duckworth adds. "Everybody else leaves their phone at the office at the end of the day."

One of the most beneficial apps Duckworth has started using is a free, family tracking app.

"If the guys aren't clocking in and out perfectly, or they're driving, I can look on their and see where they are," he says. "It was cheaper than all the other business ones, and I can create 'pings.' So, for the town to the north of us, I set it up at the furthest part south. So, when they reach that location, it pings. And in case I forgot to add something to their schedule that day, I can see they're entering and exiting that area."

Duckworth says that even as his business expands, he doesn't feel the need to spend a lot of money on fleet tracking.

"You can pay hundreds of dollars a

month for GPS trackers on every vehicle," he says. "And it'll tell you to the second where they are, but I don't really need that. I just need to find them when I need them."

Roberts says her company uses traditional vehicle tracking technology, but it's more for reassurance when questions arise, then keeping tabs on those out in the field.

"We do have GPS on our trucks," she says. "It helps us go back and just verify where people have been. There's been times where people say we haven't been there, and we can say 'Yes we were, we have GPS on our trucks. We were there at this time, and on this date.'"

**VALUE OUTSIDE THE BOTTOM LINE.** All four say embracing technology has allowed their companies to grow, thus increasing revenue. However, they all measure its return on investment in other elements of the business.

Greer says he makes very few decisions without first consulting the information garnered by the software.

"I tend to be a data guy, so we focus on technology that provides us better, more timely data," he says. "In a space where you're looking at thinner margins than you'd like at times, having that data in front of you can help you manage a lot better."

Getting a better look at the financials is also a key benefit to Roberts.

"It's about being able to really understand your numbers," she says. "Sometimes you have to let go of jobs, because the technology will tell you it's not worth having that job. You're losing money at it. Also, a lot of companies don't understand their overhead. I think the technology really shows you what your overhead is."

And for Kowalke, he measures the technology's success simply in time saved.

"It handles everything from our estimating to our invoicing," he says. "When I started, we had about 50 lawn customers that we serviced weekly. So, I would make a note that said we mowed on this date and it took us this long. Then, at the end of the month I would take all those notes, type



“I’m sure it’s important to larger companies but my time is even more important because I don’t have 20 guys out there bringing in income. It’s just two of us. The more efficient we can make ourselves – the more money we make.”

CJ KOWALKE, owner, Lawns & More

them up and do the invoices. It would take me anywhere from 10 to 12 hours.”

Now, that process is cut down to just half an hour, and Kowalke says all he has to do is double-check things.

Kowalke says using the technology has allowed him to stand out from the competition, as his business appears more professional. And customers are now able to pay online, which he says they love.

“The biggest thing has been details not falling through the cracks,” he says. “The level of service we’ve been able to provide has expanded. If they ask us for something we make sure it gets put into the computer and not forgotten. And if I give them a price, it’s in there and we don’t accidentally charge them more and have an upset customer. Those elements have been huge for us.”

#### COMBATING COMMON CHALLENGES.

Despite all the advantages of technology, it is sure to come with its challenges. Roberts says that sometimes people try to blame the technology for mistakes.

“You get people who say, ‘my phone was broken that day, or my phone wasn’t charged.’ There’s people who will give you every excuse in the book for why they don’t use it, but at that point I have a conversation with them,” she says. “I tell them it’s absolutely important and absolutely necessary and not optional.”

Kowalke adds that the onboarding process when instituting a new system can be overwhelming and time consuming.

“There was a learning curve with it,” he says. “I spent a lot of hours learning how

to run the system and getting customers in there. But even through all that, I never thought ‘I don’t think this is worth it.’ It was totally worth it.”

His best advice for this is to enter all the necessary data right away, and then slowly add in more as you start working with the system. “You can quickly add all your customers and get it running without a whole lot of trouble. Then, you can go back in and all the information you want into it,” he says.

Greer agrees saying that onboarding always takes more time than you think, and what consultants tell you, it should.

“That was one of our biggest challenges was just being patient,” he says. “You’ve got to see the light at the end of the tunnel.”

For companies who are going from one system to another, Greer suggests using both for a while to make the transition easier.

“Allow plenty of time for parallel processing,” he says. “Yes, it’s double the work, but it gives you that point and counterpoint. If the old system is processing it one way and you get these results... and we’re processing it through the new system and we’re getting similar results, then fantastic. We can move forward. Or, if it’s giving us different results, then we need to go back and diagnosis where the differences are coming from.”

Greer says he’d recommend parallel processing for at least two close cycles, but he’s seen companies keep it up for nearly six months just to make sure they work out all the kinks.

#### TAKE THE TIME TO TRAIN EXTENSIVELY.

But one of the toughest challenges when

introducing new technology always seems to be getting everyone to use it.

“I’ve found that it’s helpful to get your early-adopters on board first. These are the folks that will be the main drivers of that change, and who get excited about the change and new opportunities,” Greer says.

“But you’ve also got to spend some time with the late adopters and those who are going to fight you every second of the way. Sit down with them, answer all your questions and be patient with them.”

Duckworth says his 22- and 23-year-old employees embraced the change immediately.

“It was a benefit to run a crew, because that meant you got to be in charge of that phone, and that’s a lot of responsibility,” he says.

But he’s had a few employees who wanted nothing to do with the phones.

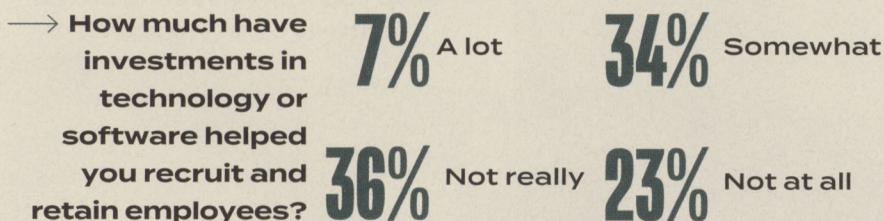
“We had some guys who were much older, and it was a challenge,” Duckworth says. “I bought new phones over the winter and they’re still struggling with them now. If anything happens that wasn’t supposed to, they just shut down.”

Roberts says plenty training is the only sure way to make everyone more comfortable with technology.

“We try to give everybody as much training as possible, and sometimes people still don’t want to use it,” she says. “But it is a requirement of your employment here, to be able to use it, so people get on board pretty quick at that point.”

Roberts adds that if after all that training there are employees still not willing to embrace the technology, she offers them one last option.

“We’ll give them as much training as they want...at that point we tell them if they still continue to not use it and need more training, then they can come in on a Saturday on their own time, and we’ll be very happy to show them how to do it,” she says. “It usually moves it along.” **L&L**



# USE IT OR LOSE IT



If nobody at your company is an expert in your new software, it's going to fail.

By Jimmy Miller

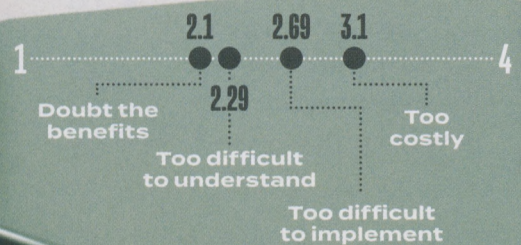
**F**or the last four years, Greenscape in North Carolina has been tiptoeing closer and closer to a paperless future. Leslie Herndon, the company's president, has spearheaded that charge, implementing all sorts of software since 2018.

And the technology is used in various ways: Some software gets bid proposals out the door, while others help manage the behind-the-scenes action at the office like getting their books in order. But the end result, is ultimately the same, as Herndon says her company continues to embrace technology. Getting the employees to that stage comes down to whether or not someone at the company can answer every sort of question the employees will have.

"The biggest thing for me is someone needs to own them," Herndon says. "New things come out all the time, somebody needs to be trained on that and they decide if they want to use it or not use it. If you're going to invest, you're going to have to learn how to use it."

**RAISING CONCERNS.** This isn't to say employees don't grumble — privately or publicly — about using new software from time to time.

↓  
**Rank in order the factors that stop you from investing in new software (on 1-4 scale.)**



Herndon says she's heard employees criticize software for being too clunky and complicated.

"To some degree, they're valid complaints," she says. "You want to make sure you hear the complaint, and you just help them get it resolved as much as possible. There's no real use in arguing about it."

Mediating those frustrations comes down to someone at the office knowing all the details about the software, Herndon says. If an employee comes into the office confused about how to use a software and nobody can help him or her, the employee will get discouraged fast and give up on trying to make the software work out.

"Nobody really got in our industry because they want to play on computers all day long," Herndon says. "There's a lot of challenges that come with (technology and) people in our industry. Having a power user of some sort gives them a resource."

**READY TO CHANGE.** Having someone in the company who "owns the software," as Herndon says, will help employees adapt accordingly once it's introduced. But it's not just the

with the software developers. Herndon says it's rare that a week goes by where she hasn't touched base with someone at their primary software provider's company, even if it's just to talk over minor issues.

But these conversations — and establishing a good relationship with someone at a software company — helps for smooth implementation of the technology. Those talks should be continual for years.

"We're still trying to get everything up to speed because software change," she says.

**MAKING THE RIGHT CHOICE.** When it comes down to actually picking a software, look in all the familiar spots — join industry associations or talk with consultants about what they've seen work for other companies.

But don't be afraid to venture outside of the green industry to pick your next software, either. Herndon says her mission has long been to eliminate paper at her company, and sometimes, the green industry relies too much on paper records for her liking. Asking peers in other industries helps keep her perspective fresh, she says, especially in the areas of sales, accounting and human resources, which aren't industry-specific.

"We don't hesitate to dive outside the normal where we need to," she says. "There's a better way out there somewhere, but

we've just got to find it."

Herndon recommends asking as many questions as possible before selecting a software. Understand as many minute details as you can, including questions that make you feel stupid for asking. She says that if you're asking the question, chances are high that someone else will ask the question (or already has) as well.

But once you've decided on a software, Herndon says it is no longer business as usual. Making sure employees operate with the software you're trying to implement is essential, even if there are growing pains along the way.

"When you switch softwares, you switch softwares," Herndon says. "You can't keep doing things the way you've always done them." **L&L**

"If you're going to invest, you're going to have to learn how to use it."

LESLIE HERNDON, president, Greenscape

initial introduction that a company needs to land the right way: Software gets updated and changes frequently, so having someone on the company's roster who tracks those changes and follows along is essential.

Picking a software that adapts to consumer demand is a good thing, Herndon says, but these changes, if left unchecked, can be infuriating for a company trying to get its employees to buy in. Whole features could become obsolete and get phased out, while the location of some files could move when updates happen.

"You want to pick a software to grow and develop, but then can't get mad about that ongoing growth and development," she says.

Ways to avoid that initial panic when updates happen include frequent conversations

↓  
**What do you use software for in your business?**  
(Choose all that apply)

**83%** Payroll/  
accounting

**59%** Job costing/  
estimating

**54%** Field service/  
scheduling

**52%** Property  
mapping

**48%** CRM/sales  
management  
and tracking

**47%** Landscape  
design/drawing

**45%** GPS/fleet  
management

**25%** Material  
inventory

**12%** Water  
management

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

**42%** In-house  
training

**25%** Never done  
software  
training

**17%** In-person training  
from software  
companies

**12%** Online  
courses

**4%** Send employee  
to software  
training

LAWN & LANDSCAPE PHOTO ILLUSTRATION



## Say goodbye to scheduling nightmares. And hello to easy.

If you're running a growing lawn care and landscaping company, it's likely you're using spreadsheets and paper to schedule and manage your crews. While it can work, you've probably found that it doesn't work well.

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**Aspire Crew Control is an easy-to-use, intuitive, and flexible software solution that can solve your scheduling hassles and headaches. Even better—it won't break the bank!**

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