

MAY 2021

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**Designscapes:**  
Capturing  
COVID layoffs

**McHale:**  
From trash  
to treasure

## The Top 100

COVID-19, a handful of new companies and other circumstances shook up the list this year.

**Chenmark:**  
Always learning

**Intermountain Plantings:**  
Above and beyond

**AAA:**  
Make them stay







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# the Top 100

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No. 74 • Designscares Colorado

**32 Green savings**

No. 85 (T) • McHale Landscape Design

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## DID YOU KNOW?

➔ The first Mangave was created through unintentional cross pollination. PG. 86



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## ONLINE CONTENTS

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## Top 100 Time

**T**his issue contains our latest Top 100 List. You'll find plenty of familiar faces and some newcomers among the companies this year. Hear how businesses all over the country combatted COVID-19 and set themselves up for success in 2020 and beyond. Curious how the competition compares to previous years? You can head to [bit.ly/lawntop100](https://bit.ly/lawntop100) to compare our 2021 list to years past. We've got them all the way back to 2005 on the website!



## Along for the ride

Rodney Smith, founder of Raising Men Lawn Care Service, has been helping people for years. And this past year or so has given him even more chances to give back. Between his 50 Yard Challenge and a new grocery program he started, Rodney is constantly traveling around the country. Catch up on what's the latest with him in our "Riding with Rodney" podcast. You can find it here: [bit.ly/RidingwithRodney](https://bit.ly/RidingwithRodney)

## Lawn & Landscape TECHNOLOGY CONFERENCE

### You won't want to miss this

The Lawn & Landscape Technology Conference is set for Tuesday, Aug. 31, through Thursday, Sept. 2, in Orlando, Florida. You won't want to miss our second-annual event filled with informative sessions, workshops and panels to help you better embrace technology to benefit your business. Pricing, hotel information and more is available at [bit.ly/LLtechconference](https://bit.ly/LLtechconference). Register now and take advantage of our Super Early Bird Pricing.

### Calling all hort students

We're accepting applications for our Richard Foster Award. The \$2,500 scholarship is available to outstanding students planning careers in the landscape, lawn care or horticulture business.

To be eligible, students must be enrolled at a recognized two- or four-year college or university working toward a degree in horticulture, turfgrass management, agronomy, environmental science or another field related to a segment of the green industry. Check out the full details here: [bit.ly/LawnScholarship](https://bit.ly/LawnScholarship)





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**Brian Horn**  
Editor, Lawn & Landscape

If the minimum wage is increased to \$15, 72% said they would increase the prices for services, while 30% would have to reduce their total labor force.

# Maximums and minimums

This month we feature our annual Top 100 list, which is a ranking of the largest companies in the landscaping industry. But this column focuses on something smaller – specifically, the recent conversation over a minimum wage increase. We surveyed our readership about the topic, and here are some of the results from approximately 200 respondents.

- To give you an idea of who was surveyed, the majority of our respondents (62%) have a gross annual revenue of below \$1 million.
- 45% said all hourly employees are paid more than \$15.
- When asked how much the federal minimum wage should be increased by, 23% said by more than \$5 dollars. That was the most popular choice, followed 19% who were in favor of a \$3 increase. Almost 18% said it should stay the same.
- If the minimum wage is increased to \$15, 72% said they would increase the prices for services, while 30% would have to reduce their total labor force. 38% expect they will be able to absorb the labor cost increases.
- In comparison, if the minimum wage increased to \$11, 70% said they'd be able to absorb the costs, while 42% said they would increase prices for services. Only 9% said they would have to reduce their labor force.
- If increased to \$15, 7% said they'd close their business, while 4% said they'd do so if increased to \$11.
- A potential minimum wage increase hasn't necessarily spurred action. Only 19% said they reached out to elected officials in the House or Senate about the issue and only 7% reached out to a state or national association.

We also received well thought out comments on the matter, which included feedback on how some companies have been preparing, and others who raised their concerns about a possible raise. For those additional thoughts, visit the web extra section on Lawn & Landscapes website at [bit.ly/llminwage](http://bit.ly/llminwage). – Brian Horn

**Lawn & Landscape**

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5811 Canal Rd., Valley View, OH, 44125

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

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**EDITORIAL**

BRIAN HORN EDITOR [bhorn@gie.net](mailto:bhorn@gie.net)  
JIMMY MILLER ASSOCIATE EDITOR [jmiller@gie.net](mailto:jmiller@gie.net)  
KIM LUX ASSISTANT EDITOR [klux@gie.net](mailto:klux@gie.net)  
JIM HUSTON J.R. HUSTON ENTERPRISES [jhuston@giemedia.com](mailto:jhuston@giemedia.com)  
BRUCE WILSON & COMPANY [bwilson@giemedia.com](mailto:bwilson@giemedia.com)  
THE HARVEST GROUP [harvest@giemedia.com](mailto:harvest@giemedia.com)  
KRISTEN HAMPSHIRE CONTRIBUTING EDITOR

**CREATIVE**

JUSTIN ARMBURGER ART DIRECTOR [jarmburger@gie.net](mailto:jarmburger@gie.net)

**ADVERTISING/PRODUCTION INQUIRIES**

CAITLIN MCCOY [cmccoy@gie.net](mailto:cmccoy@gie.net)

**SALES**

DAVID SZY PUBLISHER [dszy@gie.net](mailto:dszy@gie.net)  
TRACI MUELLER ACCOUNT MANAGER [tmueller@gie.net](mailto:tmueller@gie.net)  
BRIAN MAY ACCOUNT MANAGER [bmay@gie.net](mailto:bmay@gie.net)  
DANNY WALSH ACCOUNT MANAGER [dwalsh@gie.net](mailto:dwalsh@gie.net)  
RUSSELL WARNER NATIONAL ACCOUNT MANAGER [rwarnar@gie.net](mailto:rwarnar@gie.net)  
THOMAS VIDMAR CLASSIFIEDS ACCOUNT MANAGER [tvidmar@gie.net](mailto:tvidmar@gie.net)

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# A Simple Question for Landscape Professionals: Should You Manage Water?

By Brodie Bruner, EVP of Weathermatic

**I WAS RECENTLY TOLD** by a decent sized landscape company, "We don't think our customers will pay for water management services, and we don't believe we'll pick up enough labor savings alone to cover remote access costs for our irrigation systems. So we're just going to stick with the status quo (offline, rarely adjusted irrigation timers)." This wasn't the first time we've heard this almost exact quote, one that's in stark contrast to what some of their direct competitors believe with the same customer type and same labor and technology costs. So who's right?

If water was abundant, free, and wasn't

the #1 killer of landscaping, then I could completely understand the logic behind the strategy to not manage it. But that's just not true. Water isn't free for most properties and overwatering kills more landscapes than anything. Plus, it would be alarming if managing something as important as water is to the landscape doesn't matter because it would mean landscaping is a pure commodity, "who can mow the cheapest" business. There's no doubt that certain U.S. markets haven't had Green Industry leadership in water management emerge YET, so there's no real competitive pressure or customer awareness of the water

management opportunity (note: these are the lowest landscape maintenance margin markets in the U.S.). Landscape companies there can often get away with the status quo of not managing water. But just because they can, does it mean they should? So, it still begs the question: Should YOU manage water?

Every day we hear inspiring stories from our successful Premier Partners sharing that their customers place a high value on water management services. Water is after all the fastest growing utility expense throughout America and it's the foundation of healthy landscapes; so why wouldn't a property want it professionally managed when presented a financially viable opportunity? **FACT:** The largest property and community management companies (CBRE, JLL, Associa, First Service Residential), most Fortune 500s, and thousands of major institutions are all actively seeking and paying for water management services - right now, during a pandemic. I deal with them personally, every day, on this exact topic of water management, so there is no question where they stand on water. They're embarrassed by their waste and want it stopped now.

Ironically, the number one question we at Weathermatic receive from property owners/managers is, "Love your technology, but can you tell me which landscape companies will know how to actually use your product to manage my water?" There's frankly not an abundance of good answers in a decent chunk of U.S. markets today that desperately need trained professionals to install, monitor, and inspect thousands of sites to make a dent into the water waste (38% savings opportunity on average). These virtual deserts for water management companies are the same exact markets where I get landscape companies telling me no one is interested in water management - what a terrible disjunct! One thing's for sure: there's a huge gaping void in the market for water management service providers.

Water management in the Green Industry ironically comes down to something unrelated to water. It's about the landscape professionals who have a growth



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Over 1/3 of the industry's top 100 companies and counting are embracing the opportunity to become water management companies.

mindset – a passion to be profit-driven market makers and to use technology to do something about their #1 challenge: labor. The appetite for water management requires the same capitalistic drive that led landscape companies (albeit some kicking and screaming) to bring irrigation repairs inhouse. But the v2.0 for water management in the Green Industry is about more than repairs; it's now more profitable and smarter with global commands, alert monitoring, asset mapping, proactive water efficiency enhancements, and scheduled maintenance of system components. Winning landscape companies are looking for this new type of competitive edge that water management uniquely offers. They also recognize their labor pains won't magically go away, especially when it comes to attracting, retaining, and leveraging irrigation talent. Efficiency, standardization, and automation made possible through software and cloud based technology increasingly rule the day.

Over 1/3 of the industry's top 100 companies and counting are embracing the opportunity to become water management companies by tapping into millions of our capital to connect their irrigation portfolios online using affordable technology leasing - only \$25/month for a cloud based irrigation control system. They're monitoring alerts, tracking performance, and getting religion

about consistently completing profit-producing irrigation inspections and proposals. Consequently, they're retaining the best contracts and winning new business hand over fist with the almost unfair advantage of bringing water management savings to the table. It's like having a gun in a knife fight. Water management companies flat out beat one dimensional landscape only companies (unless there's no water management company at the table, then it's just about price). Ask yourself: would you rather be a water management company or compete against one?

For companies in the industry who just don't get it and take an intentional stand to not manage water, there's probably nothing anyone will say to change their procrastination-based strategy. Until, as the saying goes, "when the pain to stay the same is greater than the pain to change, things change." We've seen single companies introduce water management services into their market and turn it on its head, almost overnight. Millions of dollars in landscape contracts are being won (and lost) because water is now the tie breaker. The future has



**Brodie Bruner**  
Executive Vice President

never been brighter for water management and thus the Green Industry. Light bulbs are going off in the minds of landscape industry entrepreneurs based on the plain truth about the importance of efficiently managing water, and that should also be your truth:

It comes down to a simple choice about water management, will you: Delay, Dabble, or Dominate? The Weathermatic Premier Partner program combines the training, marketing, capital, social cause, and success guarantees in a simple process, proven time and time again. It's not for everybody, but if you think it might be for you, let us know. You'll be glad you did!

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# What makes a good leader?

Multimillionaire Gary Vee talks which qualities are key to leading effectively.

By Kim Lux

**G**ary Vaynerchuk, better known as Gary Vee, knows a thing or two about leadership. As an entrepreneur, author and speaker, he's learned what elements of leadership are obvious and what's not talked about enough.


"Work ethic, determination, tenacity, ambition – all those are incredibly great traits for leadership," he said. Vee said these are all part of an 'old world' approach to leadership, while things like empathy, compassion, gratitude and humility trump those other qualities.

Vee delivered a keynote speech to green industry professionals during Jobber's Professional Development Day in March.

"I believe that most people hate accountability," Vee said. "They'd rather blame somebody else. It's just the way it is. And I think it's a huge mistake... no question the thing that's helped me the most in my career is realizing that any mistake anyone's ever made is completely my fault because I am the person who hired them."

Vee said that by first recognizing that you're wrong before focusing on what someone's mistake was helps you take on more accountability.





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## GARY VAYNERCHUK, OR 'GARY VEE,' TOLD ATTENDEES AT JOBBER'S PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT DAY THAT GOOD LEADERS ARE OFTEN EMPATHETIC AND CURIOUS.

He also suggested finding someone who actively takes accountability during times of crisis to serve as leaders within your company.

"I say to a lot of my leaders, 'I don't need any peace time generals,'" he said. "Show me what you do when there's adversity. Show me what you do when the pressure comes on. That, to me, is pure leadership."

Vee said empathy also goes hand in hand with accountability. By remembering these two things, a leader can have a meaningful conversation with someone who's made a mistake that will lead to resolution.

Vee said another characteristic of a great leader is curiosity. "Have you spent time trying to figure out if LinkedIn can help? Or does a podcast help?" he asked.

Vee recommended being curious and reflecting on if direct mailers, or print ads,

or any other marketing approach are really working for your company.

He added that good leaders should spend 30 to 40 hours mastering something new, like how to utilize social media or YouTube, in order to grow their business.

"It's hard to inspire your organization to be more progressive in its marketing if you yourself haven't really gone there or dismiss it," he said. "Complacency is a huge mistake."

While accountability and curiosity have certainly helped Vee, he said there are ele-

ments of leadership that he's struggled with over the years.

"As a manager of people, I struggled with delivering bad news," he said.

Vee said early on when he'd address someone for a lackluster performance, he would dance around the issue and wind up boosting that person up, then the next time an issue arose, he would get frustrated and end up firing them.

Now, Vee said he focuses on a form of kind candor.

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"I think people use candor as a way to be mean, and to rear their insecurities and talk down to people. I don't love that," he said. "That's why I call it kind candor. You have to be able to deliver feedback to people and you need to be kind about it."

Vee said good leaders make a note to hedge with kindness. He recommended starting with a positive note, transitioning into the problem and then finishing with a resolution.

By making it a point to embrace these traits, Vee said that also promotes humility – his final cornerstone of a good leader.

"Humility is incredibility important," he said. "I think a lot of you would have a lot more success if you didn't need to take credit for everything your team is doing. It really matters. I highly recommend you get into an honest place of self-awareness."

## KENWORTH DEBUTS NEW TRUCK LINE

The models are designed with increased cab space and more safety features.

PHOENIX – For the first time in nearly 30 years, Kenworth Trucks is releasing an all-new line of work trucks that will be available sometime in the third quarter of 2021.

The company debuted their trucks to media during a preview event in downtown Phoenix last week. Of the five new trucks, the T180 is perhaps most notable for landscapers. It's a Class 5 truck that can come with a 16-foot stake bed, which could help moving materials or

equipment for crews out in the field. It can come equipped with a three-person bench seat and offers a 2.1-meter cab (eight inches wider than previous trucks) for more user comfort.

"The biggest thing was cab space," said Kevin Baney, Kenworth's general manager. "That was probably the top feedback from customers was just providing additional room."

The company also revealed four other trucks: the T280 (a water tank and box van models were both available), T380 and T480. Kenworth has not yet determined prices for any of the models.

Five years ago, Kenworth started talk-

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ing with customers about what they could do to redesign the trucks. Ultimately, they conducted roughly 500 interviews with clients during the design process, some of

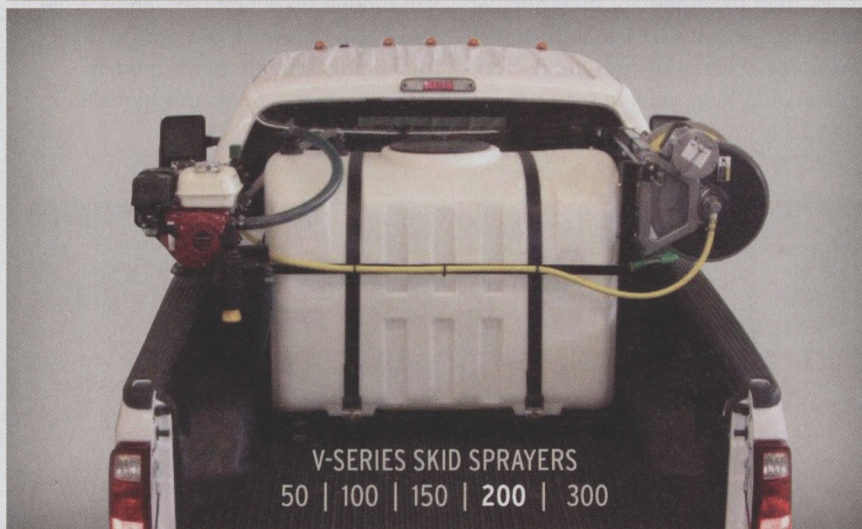
which were commercial landscapers. They frequently received feedback on comfortability and the three-person bench seat. Plus, they added additional storage spots in

the cab to let drivers leave phones, wallets, keys and more in the truck without those items rattling around, and a new climate control system that's easy to navigate.

"We've always leveraged our customer councils (but) medium duty is a little bit different – it's more about the driver," Baney said. "We pulled in a ton of drivers, and all of the different applications represented by these trucks, we had to go get their requirements."

Comfortability wasn't the only factor considered when designing the new models: They're equipped with a PACCAR TX-8 automatic transmission and, for the T180 specifically, a PX-7 engine that generates up to 325 horsepower. The T180 and T280 come with tire sizes ranging from 19.5 to 22.5 inches and rear axle ratings of 11,500 to 21,000 pounds. Those two models also

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### KENWORTH RELEASED FIVE NEW TRUCKS, INCLUDING THE T180, WHICH CAN COME WITH A STAKE BED.

come with a low roof as the standard option but can come with a raised roof instead. Frame lengths are determined by the customer order and what they specify in their needs, whether it needs to become a dump truck, snow plow or something else entirely.

"Medium duty customers, a lot of them put bodies on the back of the trucks, so we worked very closely with the body builders and got a lot of feedback from them as well while we were designing the vehicle," said JT Mansurov, Kenworth's medium duty marketing manager. "When the customer orders the vehicle, they already know which body they put on the truck, so they already give us that information and the plant builds it according to spec to make sure that body fits properly."

Additionally, Baney said visibility and safety were frequently discussed when





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Kenworth revealed five new trucks at a recent media event in Phoenix, marking the company's first all-new line of trucks in nearly three decades.

designing the new trucks. The front windshield on all five models is larger than before, increasing visibility by up to 17%. The new Kenworth Digital Display is also a seven-inch high-definition display that's standard on all five trucks. It displays the speedometer, tachometer, oil pressure and coolant temperature, though it can also display various pieces of information like gauges or trip information.

With the right specifications, the display also analyzes speed limit signs and determines how fast the vehicle directly ahead of the truck is going. If the driver inches too close, the display lights up with clear warning signs, and if the driver drifts into another lane, the vehicle makes sounds that mimic rumble strips.

## CAGWIN & DORWARD JOINS SPERBER LANDSCAPE COMPANIES

Cagwin's CEO, Steve Glennon, will continue his leadership of the company alongside his existing management team.

WESTLAKE VILLAGE, Calif. – Sperber Landscape Companies has expanded into the Northern California marketplace as it joins with commercial landscaping services company, Cagwin & Dorward.

PHOTO BY JIMMY MILLER



Headquartered in Petaluma, California, Cagwin & Dorward ranked No. 37 on our 2020 Top 100 list. The company was founded in 1955 and has grown to include multiple locations servicing California's Bay Area, Sacramento, and the Central Valley.

"We are honored to partner with such a well-respected company. Cagwin & Dorward has the type of brand recognition that only comes from decades of hard work and strong multigenerational leadership," said Richard Sperber, Sperber Landscape Companies' managing partner. "This is a

big step for Sperber as we expand in our home state of California."

Cagwin's CEO, Steve Glennon, will continue his leadership of the company alongside his existing management team.

"We are very excited to partner with Sperber Landscape Companies," Glennon said. "Combining our management teams and resources will provide the means to take Cagwin & Dorward to the next level and create more opportunities for our employees."

Transaction terms were facilitated by Bill Arman of Harvest the Green Partners.

## ROBIN AUTOPILOT ACQUIRES MOWBOT

Robin Autopilot will launch a newly expanded partnership with Husqvarna Group, a Mowbot investor.

**R**obin Autopilot USA has acquired Mowbot, a robotic lawn care franchise business with 16 locations throughout the U.S.

As part of the acquisition, Robin Autopilot will launch a newly expanded partnership with Husqvarna Group, a major investor in Mowbot and a current equity partner of Robin.

Following the transaction, Mowbot will become known as "Mowbot Powered by Robin" and will move its headquarters from Durham, North Carolina, to the Dallas-Fort Worth Metroplex where Robin is looking to expand its U.S. headquarters.

The business will be managed by Robin Holdings, led by CEO Logan Fahey.

Mowbot's operators will gain full access to all of Robin's key offerings, including a proprietary software package of fleet management, surveyor and customer acquisition tools, plus patented products such as Robin's robotic door system for navigating around fences and tight spots.

The acquisition continues Robin's rapid expansion as it increases its position in robotics as a service (RaaS) for the U.S. lawn care industry.



### MOWBOT WILL MOVE FROM DURHAM TO DALLAS-FORT WORTH.

In December 2020, Robin entered a similar arrangement with Weed Man USA to introduce the benefits of robotic mowing to a growing portion of the North American lawn maintenance and landscaping market.

"Husqvarna is a pioneer in the robotic mowing industry, and we are pleased to partner with them even more directly as we work together to change how North America mows," Fahey said.

"Adding Mowbot's experienced operators to the Robin platform will further our goal to expand our presence as a leader in disruptive RaaS technology for the lawn care industry.

"Robin's innovative platform coupled with Husqvarna's global leadership in robotics will provide leading-edge RaaS solutions for landscapers and industry professionals throughout the sector."



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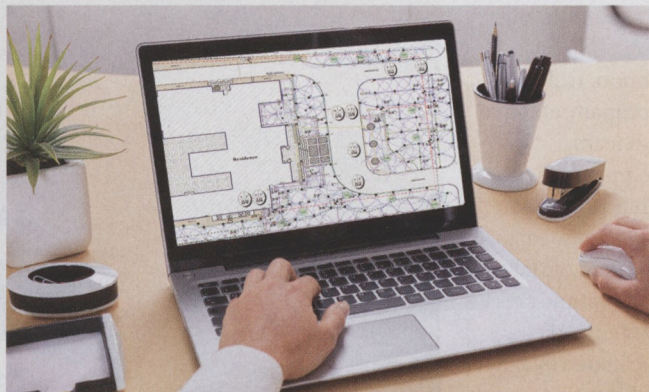
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# MASSEY SERVICES EXPANDS IN THREE SOUTHERN STATES

Texas, Georgia and Florida have all  
seen new Massey offices recently open.

ORLANDO – Massey Services, a national pest management company and family-owned company, has expanded its operations in Texas, Georgia and Florida through the opening of several new service centers in these states.

The company opened three new service centers in Texas, located in Denton, Frisco and McKinney in the Dallas-Fort Worth area. Massey also opened a new service center in Doral, Florida, to further expand their presence in the South Florida market. In The Villages community, Massey opened two new service center locations. They now have a total of eight offices in The Villages, Florida, that provide pest, termite, landscape and irrigation services. Additionally, the company opened a new service center in Decatur, Georgia, to better serve their customers northeast of Atlanta.

Massey Services also opened two new GreenUP Landscape service centers in Orange Park, Florida, and Destin, Florida. Additionally, they now offer their landscape service in Marietta, Cumming and Dallas, Georgia. Massey's landscape service includes aeration, custom-blended fertilizers, pH testing and targeted weed, insect and disease control. Finally, Massey Services has opened new commercial service centers in Cocoa, Florida; Clearwater, Florida; and Baton Rouge, Louisiana.

These offices provide commercial pest prevention and disinfecting services to all types of businesses, including healthcare, restaurants, hotels, warehouses and many more.

"These new locations continue to establish Massey service centers in local markets to enhance growth opportunities and better serve our customers," said Tony Massey, president of Massey Services. "We are very excited about these openings and expansions, which provides promotional opportunities for our team members and demonstrates our commitment to total customer satisfaction."



**MASSEY NOW OFFERS  
LANDSCAPE SERVICES IN  
MARIETTA, CUMMING AND  
DALLAS, GEORGIA, AMONG  
OTHER NEW LOCATIONS.**



# GREEN GROUP EXPANDS IN RALEIGH, ENTERS TULSA MARKET

Green Group Tulsa will be led by Green Group's regional director Benjamin Allen.

TULSA – Green Group, a national turf care company, recently added turf care company Touch' N Grow to the Green Group platform and entered the Tulsa, Oklahoma market under the Green Group brand.

Touch' N Grow, a Raleigh turf care company, merged its business with Eastern Turf Maintenance, which joined Green Group last year. Touch' N Grow owner Bruce Ludlow said this was an opportunity to continue serving his Raleigh-area customers while partnering with another local brand.

"Everyone in this area knows and respects Eastern Turf Maintenance. They have been serving Triangle area customers for more than two decades. That, combined with the ability to come on board and be a part of the exciting things Green Group is doing in the industry, was too good to pass up," Ludlow said. Touch' N Grow will now service customers under the Eastern Turf Maintenance brand and, in most cases, still by Ludlow. The companies follow the same lawn care practices, and the transition has been seamless.

Additionally, Green Group entered the

Tulsa, Oklahoma market, opening its first location using the Green Group brand. Green Group Tulsa will be led by Green Group's regional director Benjamin Allen.

"We've got a lot growing with Green Group, and I am looking forward to being able to nurture that growth right here in Oklahoma," Allen said. He will continue working with the other brands in the Green Group family as well. Green Group Tulsa is currently serving customers in the greater Tulsa area.

"We want to show that there is more than one way to grow. We are expanding organically under leaders in the Green Group family and honoring the legacies of respected, well-established brands across the nation. That means creating unique partnership opportunities crafted around individual circumstances," said Keith Freeman, founder, and CEO of Green Group. "In some cases, we are partnering with owners who are ready to retire; in other cases, they want to continue working and benefit from the synergies, support and growth opportunities we have to offer at Green Group."

## NORTHERN TOOL ACQUIRES JACKS SMALL ENGINES

All Jacks team members will continue to work from the Maryland operations and local retail store.

BURNSVILLE, Minn. – Northern Tool + Equipment has acquired Jacks Small Engines, a second generation, family-owned company providing online replacement parts

for major brands of engines, tools, and power equipment.

Northern Tool's acquisition builds on the company's expertise in tools, equipment,



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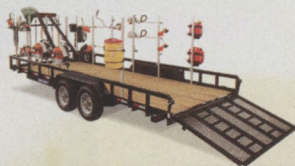


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engine and maintenance services by offering customers millions of parts for maintenance and repair. In addition, it delivers a new dimension of support to its Parts, Service and Repair offering across its 120 retail stores.

All Jacks team members will continue to work from the Maryland operations and local retail store.

Former owners John Cumberland and Adine Cumberland have joined the Northern Tool team and will remain active in the operation.

The acquisition deal was finalized on March 31.

“We share a great amount of customer crossover with Northern Tool + Equipment, and our respective customer-focused strategies really complement each other, which makes this partnership a great match for our brand,” says John Cumberland, CEO of Jacks Small Engines and son of the founder.

## PINE HALL BRICK NAMES NEW PRESIDENT, CEO

Walt Steele takes over for Fletcher Steele, the former president and CEO, who will remain onboard as executive chairman.

WINSTON-SALEM, N.C. – Pine Hall Brick recently promoted Walt Steele to president and CEO.

Fletcher Steele, the former president and CEO, remains as executive chairman and will continue to be involved on a part-time basis.

For the past three years, Walt Steele has been vice president and chief operating officer and was responsible for the day-to-day operations of the company.

“I have great confidence in Walt and the team of talented and dedicated individuals that he now leads, and I’m sure that the company is in good hands for years to come,” Fletcher Steele said.

Walt Steele has been with the company since 2011 in a variety of positions. Before he was promoted to vice president and COO in 2018, he was paver business manager.

Prior to that, Walt held positions at Dow Chemical, Aqua Treat Chemicals and Cardinal Health.

“I’m excited to step up now and lead the company as it turns 100 next year,” Walt Steele said. “I am thankful for those that I have the privilege to work alongside as we reach that milestone. Together, we are building a business that is as sustainable as the products we make and sell. As always, we will continue to be an organization that is an innovative leader in building products.”



# SAVATREE ACQUIRES COMPANY IN ROCHESTER, MICHIGAN

Advanced Arboriculture by Arbor-Olin  
has served customers for over 40 years.

ROCHESTER, Mich. – SavATree has acquired Advanced Arboriculture by Arbor-Olin of Rochester, Michigan, a full-service tree care company that has been serving customers for more than 40 years.

Advanced Arboriculture founder, Terry Jenkinson, an arborist with decades of experience in the industry, will be joining the SavATree team along with members of his staff. This union further strengthens SavATree's service at its Troy and Orion branches to customers throughout the Detroit Tri-County.

"I'm very pleased to be joining such a suc-

cessful and well-run company as SavATree," Jenkinson said. "In addition to the excellent arboriculture customers have received, we will now offer the following additional services: professional lawn care, deer deterrents, organic options and holiday décor."

"We're happy to be joining forces with such a respected tree company as Advanced Arboriculture," said SavATree CEO Carmine Schiavone. "We look forward to offering current and new customers in the Tri-County region our broad range of science-based, environmentally responsible services in the care of their properties."

# BAYER REINSTATES ARMADA

The company has decided against phasing out the Armada fungicide and is offering a discount on it through June 30, 2021.

CARY, N.C. – The Turf and Ornamentals business of Bayer, part of the Environmental Science division, has reinstated the Armada 50 WDG fungicide. Armada fungicide offers broad-spectrum control for protection against tough diseases that affect both turf and landscape ornamentals. Bayer had previously slated Armada for phase out but decided to reinstate it after feedback from the industry.

"At Bayer, we strive every day to help make lawn care operators' jobs easier as they work to give their clients beautiful,

healthy lawns," said Dr. Brad Glenn, fungicide product manager for the U.S. Turf & Ornamentals business. "We value our customers' feedback and support and were happy to reinstate Armada in our portfolio."

One treatment of Armada gives lawn care operators broad-spectrum control of a range of turf diseases, such as dollar spot, brown patch, leaf spot, large patch, fairy ring, gray leaf spot and more. It also provides protection against tough landscape ornamental diseases, like Anthracnose, leaf spots, black spot, rust, powdery mildew, scab and more. **L&L**

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## KEEPING TRACK OF KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

→ **THE PRIMARY RESPONSIBILITY** of a CEO/entrepreneur is to achieve the agreed upon objectives and profitability of the organization. In order to do so, he or she has to constantly evaluate organizational threats and opportunities.

Put another way, the CEO is constantly thinking in terms of risk-analysis as he or she attempts to achieve consistent profitability (or certainty).

The organization's annual budget is the primary document that a business uses to quantify and measure its objectives and its progress in achieving its goals. Just as a doctor uses vital signs to measure the health of the human body, so does a CEO use critical numbers to measure the health of a business. These critical numbers are often referred to as key performance indicators (KPIs). Not all numbers are critical and not all performance indicators are key. Hence, a CEO has to separate the wheat from the chaff, so to speak, and focus on that which is key. What follows are the KPIs that I've developed over my 35 years of working with green industry entrepreneurs.

**HOW KPIS WORK IN THE FIELD.** I've worked with thousands of green industry entrepreneurs during those years. The most important thing that I do for my clients is to show them how to calculate and establish daily revenue goals for all of their projects and services, including installation; maintenance and tree care crews; chemical applicators; irrigation service technicians; and so forth. Once this is done, they can measure daily production and know if they are on track or not.

**Daily KPIS:** KPIs need to be quantifiable and timeable. Once the annual budget is in place and pricing for services and crews are calculated, daily KPIs can be established. For instance, the KPI for a lawn care technician is often a minimum of \$1,000 in revenue per day. This translates to \$5,000 per week or \$21,000 per month.

This KPI is easy to measure, and it has a time deadline. A company with a seven-month lawn care season could set a revenue goal per technician at roughly \$150,000 annually (7 months x 21.7 days per month x \$1,000) minus a day or two for holidays.

The daily KPI for a two-man mowing crew might be \$800 per crew-day. This would translate to \$4,000 per week or just over \$17,000 per month (\$4,000 x 4.333 weeks per month). This crew should bill roughly \$119,000 over a seven-month season.

The annual average revenue KPI that I've calculated over the years for a maintenance crew member is between \$55,000 to \$65,000. Our sample crew falls right in line with my KPI at \$59,500 (\$119,000 ÷ 2 crew members).

This KPI methodology could easily be adapted to a general tree work crew, a gardening crew, an irrigation technician and so forth. It's also easily applied to use with smaller landscape or irrigation

installation projects. For instance, most residential irrigation installation jobs take one or two days. A four-person crew with a machine would usually bill about \$600 per man per day or \$2,400 per day (without parts). With parts this crew would bill about \$4,000 per crew-day, which is easily trackable.

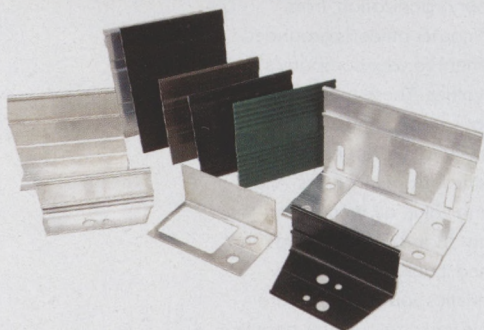
**Project KPIS:** Risk management for green industry entrepreneurs is all about field labor. I claim that 90% of a contractor's risk is tied to field labor. If you are going to make or lose money on a project, it's whether you bring the job in on budget for field-labor hours. While materials, weather, subcontractors, etc. do pose some risk, they are overshadowed by field-labor hours budget-to-actual performance. Therefore, the critical numbers for monitoring project performance are the budgeted-to-actual field-labor hours.

I'd break this figure down and track such performance for the various phases of a project. For instance, I'd possibly have a budgeted-to-actual field-labor hour KPI for demolition, site prep, grading, soil prep, planting, irrigation, general conditions and so forth.

**CONCLUSION.** Achieving budgeted profitability for a green industry company is all about risk management. Risk management is all about hitting (or beating) your budgeted field-labor hours for your projects and services. KPIs can provide a critical tool for measuring your progress toward achieving not only your daily field production goals but also your annual budgeted revenue and profitability objectives. They also provide simple, bite-size objectives that a contractor and/or manager can easily wrap his or her head around and know on a daily basis if their work is being profitable. And keeping it simple while keeping it profitable is a pretty good combination that most contractors welcome. **L&L**

↓  
**NOT ALL  
NUMBERS ARE KEY  
PERFORMANCE  
INDICATORS**, so CEOs  
need to figure out  
which metrics are best.





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

## 5 FUNDAMENTALS FOR A WINNING COMPANY

→ **AS A BASEBALL-LOVING KID** growing up in New York, opening day for spring training was my favorite day of the year. Summer was just around the corner and everything was good.

I'm lucky to live in Arizona, where half the teams do their spring training and where I can observe the hard work that goes into hitting home runs.

Spring training's emphasis on fundamentals – practicing routine plays, throwing techniques and form, base running, etc. – isn't all that different from the basics that can also help you and your company win in business.

With talent shortages, market competition and a constant need to perform at the highest level, these fundamentals will help your company get in shape for the season ahead.

**MARKET DENSITY.** When starting a new business, we take any business we can get. After a few years, it pays to remember that density is fundamental to strategy. Travel time is dead time; it does not add value to your company or to the customer. So even if you can pass the cost on to the customer and still be competitive, it is what we call a "dumb tax." Either we pay it or the customer pays it. Additionally, it raises other costs of supervision and account management due to limiting the size of the book of business that supervisors and account managers can manage.

**LEADERSHIP BENCH.** As you build your business, it's necessary to have a leadership team that does two things: ensures that as an owner, you don't get maxed out and, that with the right players, your A-Game is exponentially stronger. Creating and developing a high-performing executive team and leadership pipeline that can remain agile over your company's various stages of growth will provide you with continuity of knowledge and expertise, and give you a senior team you can trust when the going gets tough.

**SALES & OPERATIONS.** Selling solutions and delivering solutions go hand in hand. But the thread that connects sales and ops is increasingly complex. Automation helps. So does integrated business planning around your entire value chain: the systems and processes of marketing, planning, funnel and lead management, product and service quality, customer satisfaction and revenue stream forecasting. Profitability

depends on these functions sharing a real-time view of changing customer demands and a commitment to providing a seamless customer experience at every touchpoint.

**ACCURATE ESTIMATING.** Our search engine world makes it easy for customers to shop. Companies that can quickly respond to requests for pricing and services with timely proposals have a big advantage. Many contractors can deliver pricing with their initial consult or site visit within hours. If a design is required, more time is justified but speed still wins. Develop a good system of delivering fast and accurate estimates to avoid costly mistakes or potential loss of credibility. Your proposal might be the first experience your customer has with your company and can make or break their view of you and your service.

**VISION, MISSION AND VALUES.** Cultural alignment across your organization, from your front line to the corner office, is grounded in a shared commitment to your company's vision, mission and values. These fundamentals give your company its personality and its critical path, describe what you stand for and distinguish your business from all others. Alignment starts with hiring value-aligned talent; this is more important than skill in the long run as skills can be trained. Look for value fit by identifying characteristics you value that are inherent in the people you hire, such as: people who are self-starters, team players, tech-savvy or results-oriented, have a positive attitude, or who think like a manager and not an employee, and people who want to learn. **L&L**

### REMEMBER THE FUNDAMENTALS

when talent shortages, market competition and other stressors overwhelm you.



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## CREAM OF THE CROP

WITH JUD GRIGGS  
DESIGN/BUILD CONSULTANT

CREAM OF THE CROP features a rotating panel from the Harvest Group, a landscape business consulting company.

# HELPFUL HABITS TO BUILD BETTER RELATIONSHIPS

→ **DO YOU FEEL LIKE** you're just a number when submitting a project proposal? Most likely you are. In today's connected world, it's becoming more and more common to see clients requesting proposals by email, and expecting a return proposal be sent electronically. No doubt, it's a quick, easy and efficient way of communicating. It's also completely impersonal.

When you submit and respond to a proposal via email, it becomes nothing more than a business transaction. Your client then simply reviews the numbers and selects the lowest price.

As I travel the country meeting with landscape contractors, I am seeing a disturbing trend of salespeople doing nothing more than submitting their proposals by email. Don't get me wrong, email is a great tool. You can create some pretty amazing proposals electronically. However, it's certainly not the best way to be successful in sales. Submitting your numbers and hoping for the best is not a great strategy.

How do we change that? **Start building relationships!** To go from just being a number to building a long-term, loyal client relationship takes time and effort. If you are successful though, your results will be well worth it.

- Your sales will increase.
- Your profits will soar.
- The quality of your prospects and clients will be better.

The first step in building relationships is to define your ideal client. This step is critical in determining where to focus your efforts. Then, decide how best to start building great relationships.

**I have created a list of 20 Relationship Building Habits and here are my top 5:**

**1. Take a prospect or current client to lunch.** Doing this became difficult with restrictions due to COVID-19, but restrictions are now loosening up. It's time to get back to setting up lunch or breakfast meetings. If they are busy, offer to bring lunch to their office. Everyone has to eat!

**2. Send handwritten notes.** Handwritten notes make an impact. People love getting a letter in the mail. Unfortunately, this is becoming a lost art due to email and social networking. It takes no more than five minutes each day to send a thank you note, a congratulatory note or a birthday card.

**3. Write a testimonial for one of your clients.** We always want to post a testimonial from one of our clients on our websites. It gives you and your business instant credibility. What if you did that for one of your

clients? I guarantee they'll love it. You first need to find out what business they are in, and then become a client of theirs.

**4. Set up monthly face-to-face meetings with your clients.** It's quite easy to forget about your existing clients when you are trying to close prospects. Your existing clients are a great source of revenue and referrals, so make time to see your top clients monthly. If they do not want to meet face-to-face, this is where technology helps. Zoom, Microsoft Teams or Google Meets all work well. I also suggest trying Vidyard.com. It's a great way to walk your client's property virtually with them. You can point out potential enhancement opportunities on your virtual walk-through.

**5. Reward your clients when they give you referrals.** There is nothing better than getting a great referral from a client. Most turn into new sales. If you get a referral from a client, sending flowers, gift baskets or gift cards are great ways to thank them for the referral. It does not have to be much. Consider building a relationship with a restaurant or a florist where they will discount the cost of the gift cards to you if you commit to a minimum number of cards over one year.

Relationship building is not a one-time marketing effort. Relationship building needs to become a habit. It should be the way you do business going forward. If you do this, I guarantee that you will be extremely happy with the results!

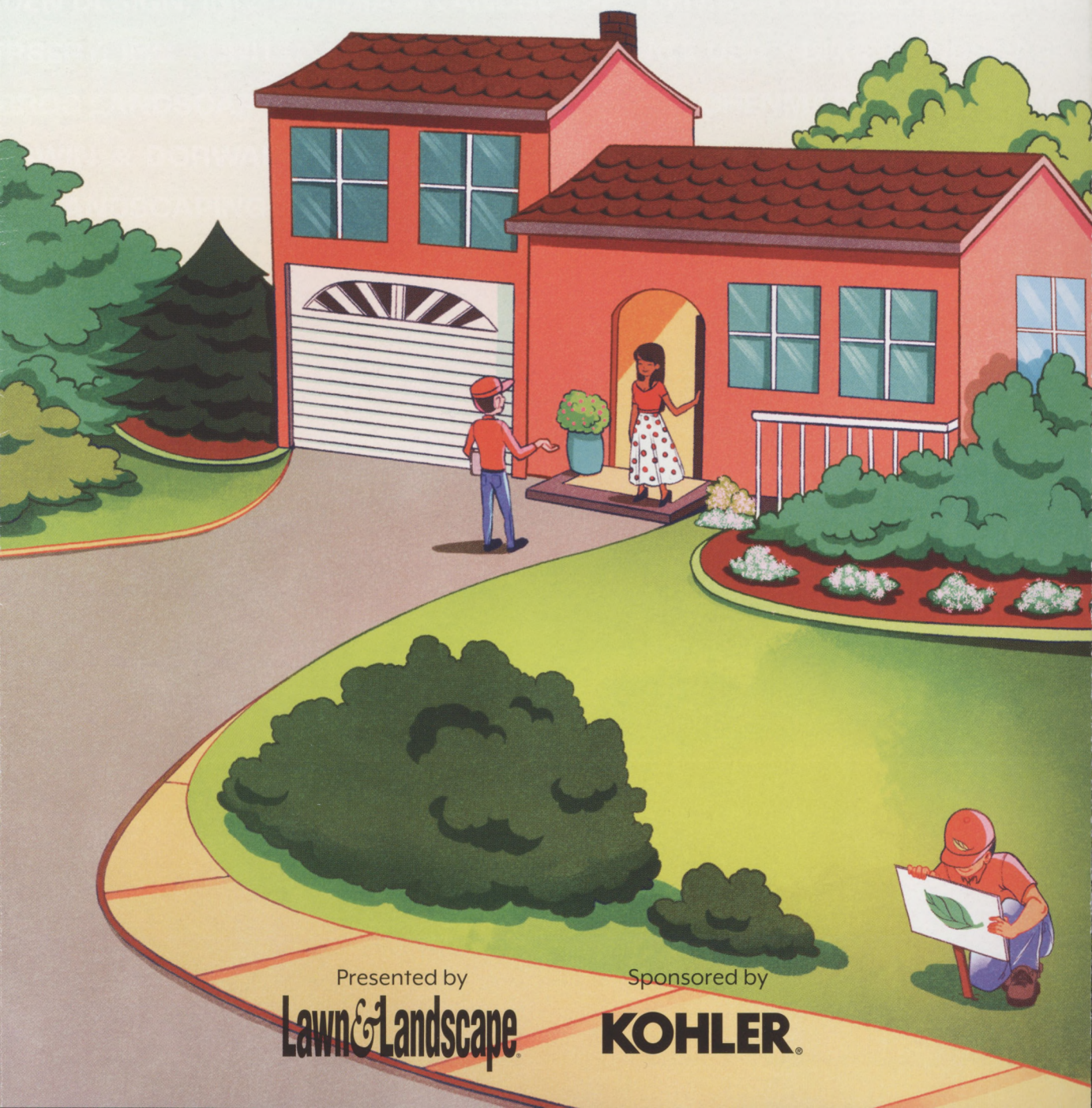
**Note:** if you would like a copy of all my Relationship Building Habits, please send me an email at [judson@harvestlandscapeconsulting.com](mailto:judson@harvestlandscapeconsulting.com). **L&L**

↓  
**REGULAR FACE-TO-FACE MEETINGS AND HAND-WRITTEN NOTES** may sound old-school, but they are still excellent ways to connect better with your clients.



# the Top 100

COMMEMORATIVE POSTER



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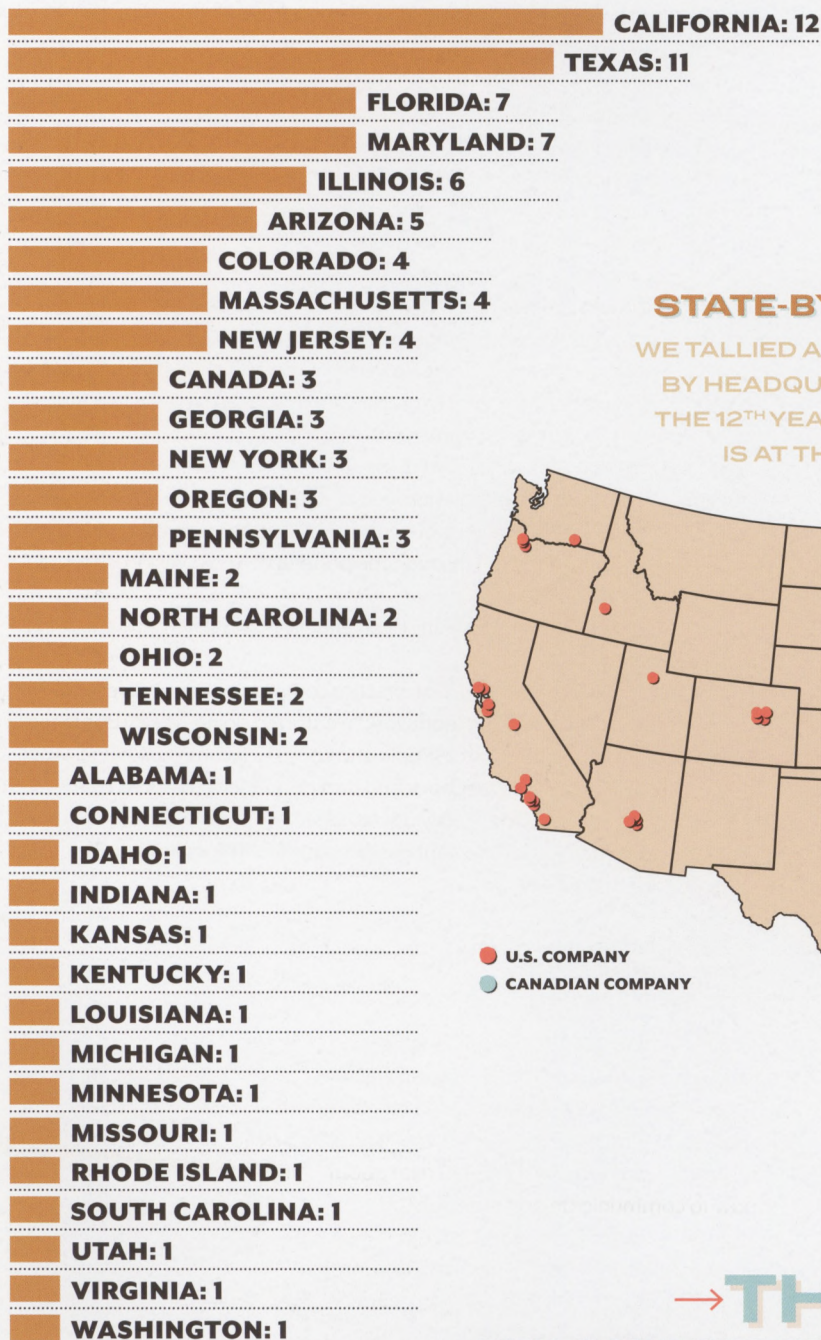
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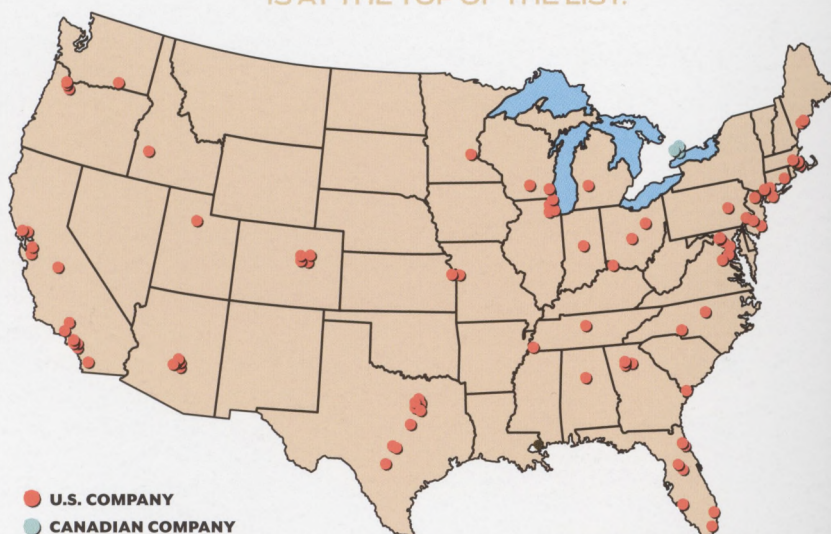
# STATE BREAKDOWN

**Some things never change** – California has been home to the most Top 100 companies for 12 years, this time with 12. But there are some newcomers to this list: Kentucky, Rhode Island, Utah and Idaho all missed the cut in 2020.



## STATE-BY-STATE CENSUS

WE TALLIED ALL 100 FIRMS' LOCATIONS BY HEADQUARTERS ADDRESS. FOR THE 12<sup>TH</sup> YEAR IN A ROW, CALIFORNIA IS AT THE TOP OF THE LIST.



● U.S. COMPANY  
● CANADIAN COMPANY

• BASED ON DATA COMPILED BY LAWN & LANDSCAPE

## → THE NEXT 10

THESE 10 COMPANIES JUST MISSED MAKING THE LIST IN 2021.

DAVID J. FRANK  
LANDSCAPE CONTRACTING

**\$24,900,000**

GREEN LAWN  
FERTILIZING

**\$23,528,217**

SANTA RITA  
LANDSCAPING

**\$24,500,000**

LAWN  
MANAGEMENT CO.

**\$23,125,368**

THE MUNIE  
COMPANY

**\$24,399,016**

ARTIS TREE LANDSCAPE  
MAINTENANCE & DESIGN

**\$22,825,634**

WLE

**\$24,250,000**

BENCHMARK  
LANDSCAPE

**\$22,435,000**

ANDRE  
LANDSCAPE SERVICE

**\$24,150,000**

LEVEL GREEN  
LANDSCAPING

**\$21,743,000**



# Top 100

THE ANNUAL TOP 100 LIST

Presented by

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## About this list

The Lawn & Landscape Top 100 list is based on 2020 revenue from landscape profit centers. Most information is reported by each company listed, and supplemental data are sourced from public records and reporting by L&L staff.

- ▶ Companies on the list earned a combined revenue of \$11,926,445,648 in 2020 – an increase of \$883,637,612 or 8% compared to 2019. Companies also reported total employment of 118,247 compared to 112,101 in 2019.
- ▶ Sperber acquired Cagwin & Dorward in January of 2021.

- ▶ BrightView does not include US Lawns revenue but does include franchise payments.
- ▶ The Davey Tree Expert Company does not separate its landscape management revenue from its overall revenue.
- ▶ This year's list includes companies from 33 states and 3 firms in Canada.

## Abbreviations

**%MT:** Maintenance

**%CLC/F:** Chemical Lawn Care/Fertilization

**%LD/B/I:** Landscape Design/Build/Install

**%II/MT:** Irrigation Installation/Maintenance

**%CR:** Commercial Revenue

**%RR:** Residential Revenue

**N/A:** No Answer/Unknown



**INDICATES NEW TO THE LIST  
OR NOT ON LIST LAST YEAR.**

2021 RANK	COMPANY	2020 RANK	2020 REVENUE	HEADQUARTERS	EMPLOYEES	% CHANGE FROM 2019	% CHANGE EXPECTED FOR 2021	% MT	%CLC/F	%LD/ B/I	%II/ MT	%CR	%RR
1	BrightView Landscapes	1	\$2,346,000,000	Blue Bell, Pa.	21,000	-3%	N/A	65%	0%	25%	0%	100%	0%
2	TurfCreon	2	\$1,400,000,000	Memphis, Tenn.	12,570	10%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A



[illegible]



36	Denison Landscaping	30	\$58,600,000	Fort Washington, Md.	480	-9%	5%	10%	0%	82%	8%	98%	2%
37	Teufel Nursery	34	\$57,955,252	Hillsboro, Ore.	400	7%	5%	13%	2%	79%	3%	99%	1%
38	United Land Services	✳	\$57,900,000	Jacksonville, Fla.	260	55%	42%	9%	0%	81%	10%	95%	5%
39	Choate USA	39	\$56,765,941	Plano, Texas	255	22%	22%	0%	0%	50%	50%	80%	20%
40	Dixie Landscape	38	\$56,100,000	Medley, Fla.	315	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	100%	0%
41	Kline Bros Landscaping	63	\$51,000,000	Manahawkin, N.J.	142	10%	5%	5%	0%	80%	0%	20%	80%
42	Sebert Landscaping	36	\$50,500,000	Bartlett, Ill.	561	1%	9%	40%	10%	20%	5%	95%	5%
43	Chenmark	✳	\$50,000,000	Portland, Maine	607	0%	15%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	60%	40%
44	Ryan Lawn & Tree	45	\$47,581,000	Merriam, Kan.	354	15%	16%	0%	39%	7%	17%	6%	94%
45	Cagwin & Dorward	37	\$47,021,007	Petaluma, Calif.	500	-2%	6%	55%	0%	25%	10%	100%	0%
46	Earthtones Design	60	\$46,500,000	Midlothian, Texas	230	26%	12%	23%	4%	48%	25%	88%	12%
47	Landscape Workshop	42	\$46,000,000	Birmingham, Ala.	715	4%	30%	65%	0%	30%	4%	95%	5%
48	Complete Landscaping Service	✳	\$45,877,800	Bowie, Md.	355	18%	10%	55%	5%	30%	4%	95%	5%
49	Baytree Landscape Contractors	43	\$45,200,000	Tucker, Ga.	475	4%	10%	40%	0%	60%	0%	100%	0%
50	SiteWorks	58	\$45,139,207	Chandler, Ariz.	252	24%	6%	16%	0%	65%	12%	100%	0%
51(t)	American Landscape	✳	\$45,000,000	Los Angeles, Calif.	285	15%	20%	27%	10%	30%	30%	100%	0%
51(t)	NELTS	✳	\$45,000,000	Franklin, Conn.	2,750	30%	30%	36%	5%	5%	7%	100%	0%
53	Senske Services	62	\$44,600,000	Kennewick, Wash.	500	12%	8%	7%	56%	7%	3%	15%	85%
54	Beary Landscaping	46	\$44,000,000	Lockport, Ill.	375	8%	15%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	90%	10%
55	Berghoff Design Group	64	\$43,290,500	Scottsdale, Ariz.	355	7%	8%	35%	0%	50%	10%	10%	90%
56	Russell Landscape Group	53	\$42,700,000	Sugar Hill, Ga.	500	11%	12%	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	100%	0%
57	AAA Landscape	48	\$41,525,000	Phoenix, Ariz.	600	4%	5%	47%	4%	40%	2%	99%	1%
58	Christy Webber & Company	40	\$40,000,000	Chicago, Ill.	251	-14%	-1%	40%	0%	50%	0%	70%	20%
59	R.P. Marzilli & Company	44	\$39,700,000	Medway, Mass.	225	-5%	13%	18%	2%	75%	1%	8%	92%
60	Maldonado Nursery & Landscaping	47	\$38,874,196	San Antonio, Texas	404	-5%	26%	25%	0%	71%	3%	28%	7%
61	Environmental Management Svc.	50(t)	\$38,850,000	Dublin, Ohio	425	17%	10%	35%	2%	45%	6%	90%	10%
62	Chapel Valley Landscape Company	50(t)	\$38,500,000	Woodbine, Md.	500	0%	8%	45%	5%	30%	10%	85%	15%
63	Bemus Landscape	54	\$37,050,000	San Clemente, Calif.	N/A	N/A	N/A	70%	0%	3%	10%	99%	1%
64	Dennis Seven Dees Landscaping and Garden Centers	55	\$36,256,770	Portland, Ore.	315	-2%	9%	24%	0%	37%	12%	43%	32%
65	Cutting Edge Services	✳	\$35,560,135	Boise, Idaho	349	7%	6%	67%	0%	16%	0%	100%	0%
66	Impact Landscaping & Irrigation	59	\$35,100,000	Jupiter, Fla.	435	-1%	15%	32%	5%	45%	18%	98%	2%
67	Superscapes	66	\$34,095,000	Carrollton, Texas	250	12%	9%	65%	0%	35%	0%	N/A	N/A
68	Gachina Landscape Management	49	\$33,415,412	Menlo Park, Calif.	400	-17%	-13%	58%	2%	3%	12%	96%	2%
69(t)	Elite Team Offices	52	\$33,000,000	Clovis, Calif.	350	-6%	5%	20%	0%	12%	68%	99%	1%



69(t)	Harvest Landscape Enterprises	80	\$33,000,000	Orange, Calif.	575	15%	30%	53%	2%	15%	15%	100%	0%
69(t)	Landscape Design Concepts	71	\$33,000,000	Norwood, N.J.	120	4%	N/A	60%	0%	20%	0%	85%	15%
72	Landscape Services, Inc. (LSI)	56	\$32,780,424	Nashville, Tenn.	300	-11%	10%	72%	5%	10%	10%	98%	2%
73	LMI Landscapes	94(t)	\$32,570,000	Carrollton, Texas	214	35%	40%	33%	0%	37%	20%	100%	0%
74	Designscapes Colorado	65	\$32,208,000	Centennial, Colo.	300	6%	10%	15%	0%	80%	2%	59%	41%
75	Greenscape Land Design	57	\$32,000,000	Raynham, Mass.	325	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
76	Naturescape	73	\$31,415,171	Muskego, Wis.	320	8%	5%	10%	80%	0%	0%	5%	95%
77	Xquisite Landscaping	61	\$31,274,400	Stoughton, Mass.	215	18%	15%	17%	1%	68%	8%	100%	0%
78	Intermountain Plantings	✱	\$31,000,000	Bluffdale, Utah	243	17%	28%	16%	0%	82%	0%	100%	0%
79	The Bruce Co. of Wisconsin	77	\$30,847,000	Middleton, Wis.	359	8%	1%	37%	0%	53%	2%	80%	20%
80	Chalet Nursery, Landscape and Garden Center	68	\$30,800,000	Wilmette, Ill.	350	3%	4%	65%	5%	30%	0%	0%	100%
81	Stay Green	81(t)	\$30,350,000	Santa Clarita, Calif.	388	14%	17%	80%	0%	10%	8%	100%	0%
82	Environmental Designs	70	\$30,200,000	Henderson, Colo.	288	3%	7%	20%	3%	52%	8%	65%	35%
83	Perfect Cuts of Austin	75	\$30,195,000	Austin, Texas	89	7%	0%	27%	1%	51%	21%	100%	0%
84	Gibbs Landscape Co.	69	\$30,100,000	Smyrna, Ga.	385	3%	4%	70%	0%	30%	0%	55%	45%
85(t)	Merchants Landscape Services	72	\$30,000,000	Santa Ana, Calif.	498	4%	4%	85%	5%	0%	10%	100%	0%
85(t)	McHale Landscape Design	81(t)	\$30,000,000	Upper Marlboro, Md.	300	10%	3%	38%	2%	60%	0%	0%	100%
87	Southern Botanical	76	\$29,019,538	Dallas, Texas	310	1%	20%	26%	4%	51%	14%	65%	35%
88	Designs by Sundown	91	\$29,000,000	Littleton, Colo.	220	16%	20%	24%	3%	66%	7%	15%	85%
89	Pacific Landscape Management	78	\$28,716,988	Hillsboro, Ore.	290	0%	8%	50%	0%	30%	10%	100%	0%
90	Caretaker Landscape and Tree Management	74	\$28,712,000	Gilbert, Ariz.	288	0%	20%	30%	0%	58%	4%	100%	0%
91	NutriLawn Corp.	96	\$28,000,000	Toronto, Ontario	420	15%	7%	0%	90%	0%	5%	N/A	N/A
92	DLC Resources	84(t)	\$27,800,000	Phoenix, Ariz.	380	4%	0%	80%	0%	12%	0%	100%	0%
93	Meadows Farms	94(t)	\$27,500,000	Chantilly, Va.	225	12%	14%	10%	2%	88%	0%	3%	97%
94	Southview Design	86	\$26,696,658	St. Paul, Minn.	220	4%	9%	33%	0%	52%	3%	48%	52%
95	Earthworks	92	\$26,400,000	Lillian, Texas	375	6%	10%	55%	0%	30%	10%	100%	0%
96	Down To Earth Landscape	87	\$26,245,000	Deptford, N.J.	105	3%	3%	10%	0%	70%	10%	95%	5%
97	Schumacher Companies	✱	\$26,000,000	W. Bridgewater, Mass.	240	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A
98	Yardnique	✱	\$25,861,774	Morrisville, N.C.	300	10%	15%	80%	0%	20%	0%	100%	0%
99	DJ's Landscape Management	90	\$25,600,000	Grand Rapids, Mich.	365	2%	10%	35%	5%	5%	2%	100%	0%
100	Frank and Grossman Landscape Contractors	79	\$25,100,000	Hayward, Calif.	276	11%	15%	35%	0%	10%	40%	35%	65%



# LESSONS LEARN

→ While the effects of COVID-19 hit businesses across the industry, larger companies had more resources to deal with the challenges it presented but also had more of those challenges to manage. We asked leaders of some of the Top 100 companies about what they learned from the past 12-plus months.

“We had one client tell us that ‘Corporate says to stop all landscape maintenance until further notice.’ We knew and they knew that this would not last long term, so we did the bare minimum service to keep the hotel in decent shape for no charge. They were only closed for two months and, since then, they have been busier than ever. They are incredibly appreciative that we were there when they really needed us.”

LEE EDWARDS,  
President/CEO, The Greenery

**Kevin McHale**, Principal, McHale Landscape Design, Upper Marlboro, Maryland.

I WAS VERY GRATEFUL and impressed by how quickly our company pivoted and adapted to “different” working conditions. Our managers really stepped up to calm and reassure our people that protocols are important, and we will get through this by working together. Landscape professionals are somewhat used to challenges. The weather, material availability, labor shortage, regulation and the rising cost of doing business are all things we face as an industry. These are things that we prepare for and deal with regularly. However, no one had a global pandemic on their radar and we had little time to prepare for it. The response of our company and our industry has been monumental. We all pulled together and helped each other through networking, effective communication and team building.

There is no doubt that we have learned some valuable business and life lessons. We learned the importance of communication. We learned that reassuring our people that we would get through the pandemic had a very positive effect on their personal lives, too.

Remote workstations have clearly been effective, and several positions will remain remote.

Most importantly, we learned that effective communication on a regular basis fosters a feeling of synergy and teamwork. We started doing weekly updates during the pandemic as a method of simple and consistent communication. We received quite a bit of positive feedback and that people felt reassured by the weekly company-wide address. The weekly discourse started out as COVID informative but quickly broadened to stories about business and life. The updates will remain long after the pandemic.



**Bob Grover**, President, Pacific Landscape Management, Portland, Oregon

COVID-19 WAS DEFINITELY challenging, and business did slow a little bit. However, we have been working to utilize cloud-based technology and having our staff needing to work remotely this past year. We learned a lot about how to communicate and manager administrative processes away from the office.

Learning how to effectively utilize Zoom meetings with customers and internally will improve our efficiency in timeliness. Having converted all of our administrative functions to cloud-based services will allow our managers and admin staff great flexibility in working remotely.

The silver lining to the pandemic is forcing us to utilize those systems to improve our service and communication. It will also allow flexibility with employees to help them maintain work life balance and support their families' schedules while completing their work responsibilities.





# ED IN 2020

**Lee Edwards,**  
President/CEO, The Greenery,  
Hilton Head, South Carolina

**WHAT WE LEARNED** is that no matter what is thrown at you, you have to adapt. Whether it means talking to your clients that are struggling to stay in business or meeting with your employees to hear their concerns and provide a path moving forward, you have to be able to adapt.

We service a lot of hospitality clients (vacation rentals, hotels, resorts, etc...) and some of them had a really tough time last spring. When a client says "we have zero income, and we can't pay for landscaping" then you listen and work with them through the bad times as well as the good. You work together on a budget and make sure you are doing what is best for them, as long as we can both stay in business.

We had one client tell us that "Corporate says to stop all landscape maintenance until further notice." We knew and they knew that this would not last long term, so we did the bare minimum service to keep the hotel in decent shape for

no charge. They were only closed for two months and, since then, they have been busier than ever. They are incredibly appreciative that we were there when they really needed us.

Many of our employees didn't know whether we were going to be shut down or not. Fortunately, we never were, and we continued working throughout. We provided guidance and PPE as well as sanitizing products and we paid for on site testing when we had heightened risks. We also paid any employee that tested positive for the virus for any hours they missed. Our reasoning for this is that we did not want sick people coming to work because they didn't want to miss a paycheck and risk further spreading the virus to the rest of the team.

Coronavirus has been a miserable experience for The Greenery, but we consider ourselves fortunate compared to others. Coronavirus, like many other challenges, has helped us work together as a team.



**Jennifer Lemcke,** CEO, Weed Man,  
Orono, Ontario

**FOR WEED MAN** it was critical for us to maintain a clear line of communication with our franchisees, listen to what they really needed, assess and come up with solutions to keep them working and on track of their goals. We have built a lot of trust over the years, and this trust is what carried us through the last year. We worked diligently with suppliers, competitors, state,

provincial and national associations, HR lawyers, bankers and accountants to make sure we were able to meet all the needs of the franchisees. It was truly a team effort, and we are stronger for it.

It forced us to create new process and procedures to provide a no touch experience with the customer, we were able to have office staff and sales people work from home, and the lawn care technicians deliver invoices electronically. Honestly, many of the things that changed last year will have a lasting impact on our company for the positive. We will continue to enhance this digital transformation and consider having people work from home to increase our pool of talent. The network truly showed resiliency and determination to continue providing a safe work environment for our employees and maintain a focus on delivering service to the customers.

I am very proud of our network of franchisees but equally proud of our industry that worked together to keep people employed and moving forward.



## Lesson Learned No. 2

**THE CUSTOMER BUYING BEHAVIOR** has been changing over the years, but COVID has brought it to the forefront. People's expectations are evolving. You need to make sure that your process and procedures are changing and evolving as the customer's buying behavior changes. When they ask for a quote online you need to make sure you deliver the quote fast (seconds/minutes) because if your process is days, you are last in the game. As more people are working from home and spending more down time enjoying their backyards, they are looking for our services to help beautify their surrounding.

When the idea strikes them that they need the service, it is a quick decision that leads them to fill out a form and they do not want to wait. As you look at your process, you really need to look through a different lens, you need to consider yourself and how your own buying habits have changed, would you do business with you, would you wait?

COVID forced everyone that wants to stay in business to be innovative and nimble; we had franchisees that had already started the digital transformation; those early adopters helped pave the way for our small to mid-size franchisees. It was so inspirational to see everyone pulling together to help each other.



# the Top 100



—  
**Designscapes:**  
Capturing  
COVID layoffs

—  
**McHale:**  
From trash  
to treasure

—  
**Chenmark:**  
Always  
learning

—  
**Intermountain  
Plantings:** Above  
and beyond

—  
**AAA:**  
Make  
them stay



# Overcoming adversity

**LET ME CONGRATULATE** all of you on having a successful year despite the pandemic and the global economic conditions. We, at Kohler Engines, feel we are in awe of your ability to keep your businesses growing. We are so proud to serve such industry.

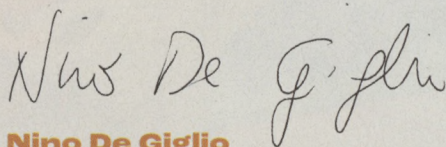
Over the last months, we focused on creating a workplace where all associates can achieve their full potential and commit to helping communities thrive and grow. We are convinced that a more diverse, sustainable and inclusive company can delight and provide customers with better products and services.

It is undeniable that, in more than 100 years of history, Kohler Engines has always showed tenacity in overcoming adversity. This last year has been very challenging, but Kohler associates' commitment turned out to be the key to overcome the difficulties posed by the pandemic and we are proud to state that we are now stronger than before and ready to better serve our customers.

We will continue to put our efforts to enhance performance and durability, reduce overall consumption and total cost of ownership, and offer full reliability.

We are so excited about working with you in the future and we wish you a highly rewarding year.

Best regards,



**Nino De Giglio**

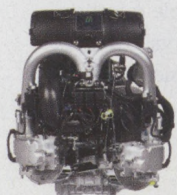
**Director – Marketing Communications  
& Channel Management, Kohler Engines**



**WE ARE  
CONVINCED THAT  
A MORE DIVERSE,  
SUSTAINABLE AND  
INCLUSIVE COMPANY  
CAN DELIGHT  
AND PROVIDE  
CUSTOMERS WITH  
BETTER PRODUCTS  
AND SERVICES.**



# THE POWER TO WORK HERE.



Who says gardening has to be a chore? KOHLER® Command PRO EFI are powerful gas engines that make light work of cutting your overgrown grass. Simple to use, easy to maintain and amazing cutting power. You can thank us later.

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## Budding labor opportunities

Designscapes Colorado had to get creative when it came to hiring in the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic.

Story by **Brooke Bilyj** • Illustration by **Jay Bendt**

### WHEN LANDSCAPING COMPANIES

were deemed essential businesses last spring, Phil Steinhauer was relieved to learn that Designscapes Colorado could continue working through the pandemic. But COVID caused another dilemma for the company when national borders closed – shutting off the flow of H-2B workers that Steinhauer has relied on to fill his labor force for the last 15 years.

“Having to hire hundreds of employees over the course of three weeks was a big challenge,” says Steinhauer, Designscapes CEO, who typically brings in 170 H-2B workers every year to perform commercial and residential landscape construction and maintenance work around Denver. “Our approach was to look at where the opportunity was instead of looking at this as a disaster.”

**NEW LABOR POOL.** With many other businesses closed due to COVID, Steinhauer looked to the local labor pool. To capture candidates laid off from other industries, Designscapes began holding weekly job fairs in the parking lot, where HR teammates could process as many applicants as possible in a socially distanced setting.

“We started to find a lot of displaced restaurant and hotel workers applying, because the hospitality industry shut down when the pandemic started,” Steinhauer says. “Most of them had zero (landscape) industry experience, but we were looking for people more than we were experience.”

Designscapes promoted these job fairs by distributing flyers and advertising on local radio stations, but Steinhauer says the most effective promotion was word-of-mouth. “We started a referral program where we paid bonuses to employees who referred people to us,” he says. “The new people we hired (would tell) their friends, so it grew exponentially. We probably had 30 or 40 applicants every Monday.”

Applicants filled out a simple questionnaire to confirm that they had a valid driver’s license and could perform basic job duties like lifting and digging. “If you were willing



to work, you had a job," Steinhauer says.

Over the first couple months of the pandemic, Designscares hired about 250 workers at these weekly job fairs. Since they weren't vetting candidates much before hiring, Steinhauer assumed there would be some attrition, he says, "knowing that some wouldn't show, some wouldn't work out, and some, when the restaurants reopened, would go back."

However, the success of this hiring method surprised him, as more than 150 employees stayed through the summer, and about 120 remained through the winter. "A lot of them saw opportunity in the upward mobility that the hospitality industry doesn't have," Steinhauer says. "When restaurants slowly started to open back up, we didn't lose what we thought might just be temporary employees; they became full-time employees."

This labor shift caused an unforeseen domino effect, unlocking new opportunities as Designscares worked to integrate these employees into their business model.

**ON-THE-JOB TRAINING.** The biggest dilemma with hiring displaced hospitality workers was their lack of landscape experience. Once Steinhauer filled Designscares labor force for 2020, "the next challenge was: How do we now train them in a format with social distancing?" he says.

About three years ago, Designscares filmed and produced its own training videos with employees demonstrating the company's processes, safety standards and equipment guidelines. Pre-pandemic, the whole team gathered at the office to watch these videos and kick off the season with a barbecue.

Instead, Steinhauer relied on his experienced foremen and crew leaders to gradually train new hires on the jobsite. "It was a slow process," he says. "I don't think ev-



Of the nearly 250 workers Designscares Colorado hired to kick off the 2020 season, very few had any landscaping experience. They instead had to rely on training videos and lots of on-the-job learning.

erybody got trained until the Fourth of July."

To make remote training more effective, the Designscares team spent last fall and winter setting up an online learning management system – making its training videos and tests accessible to employees anywhere, on any device. After rolling out this remote safety training program in April 2021, the company plans to add more educational courses in the future to help employees advance into management roles.

"Now we have this whole platform that came out of our need to train employees during COVID," Steinhauer says. "We have a committee of three people working on what is going to be a year-round program called Designscares Academy, which can open doors for all kinds of career training."

**YEAR-ROUND GROWTH.** Designscares' hiring approach caused a ripple effect throughout the business. Instead of being a strictly seasonal operation dependent on the availability of H-2B visas, the company can now continue working without pause.

"To adapt to the changing conditions of the employment situation, we've had to shift our business model to be more year-round," Steinhauer says. "The advantage is it will allow our company to grow in a different way."

To keep this new workforce engaged all

year long, Designscares is now offering year-round maintenance services and pursuing snow removal contracts that require more manual shoveling.

But the real key to keeping employees engaged year-round isn't just about the workload; Steinhauer says it boils down to the culture and team spirit.

"It takes a team of people all kicking in and embracing this new opportunity," says Steinhauer, who has about 110 full-time employees in addition to a labor force of about 200. "From our HR department to our foremen to our project managers, they were all willing to change the way they did business to accommodate these unskilled workers. Embracing these employees as part of our company is an important part of keeping them over the winter."

Although COVID forced Steinhauer to rethink Designscares' labor force, this new approach to hiring has transformed the company from a seasonal business into a year-round service. Meanwhile, the need for remote training prompted the creation of Designscares Academy to develop skills and advancement opportunities for employees. Together, these changes positioned the company to achieve record sales during the pandemic, posting 10% growth and over \$32 million in revenue since last year.

"It would have been easy for us to go back to our old model," says Steinhauer, "but our willingness to change our business was a big factor (in our growth)." L&L

# \$32M

**DESIGNSCAPES  
STILL MANAGED  
TO INCREASE ITS  
REVENUE HAVING  
NO H-2B WORKERS.**



# the Top 100

№ 85 (T)  
McHALE LANDSCAPE DESIGN  
UPPER MARLBORO, MARYLAND



## Green savings

McHale Landscape Design originally started its in-house recycling program to reduce its trash expenses, but now the sustainable decision is savings customers money, too.

Story by **Kim Lux** • Illustration by **Jay Bendt**



**LIKE WITH MOST BUSINESSES** in 2020, the coronavirus pandemic certainly impacted McHale Landscape Design, based in Upper Marlboro, Md.

"Hitting us right at the busiest time of year – it was kind of like the perfect storm," says President Kevin McHale.

However, it turned out to be the best year in the company's 40-year history.

"In May and June, we saw all these people who had been home for quite a while... our phones started ringing excessively," McHale says. "At the end of the year, it was one of our best year's top line and bottom line. We certainly wouldn't have forecasted that in March or April of last year."

And this wasn't the first storm McHale Landscape Design had to weather. Back during the Great Recession, the company found a way to tighten its belt by starting an in-house recycling program – a move that's still paying off today.

McHale says being a 100% high-end residential company helped the business fair better than others during that time, but it also allowed them to take a closer look at where they could cut costs.

"It gave us the opportunity to really examine our operations and how we were doing things," he says. "And one of our pet peeves has always been our trash removal line item... it just seemed like it was always such a large number."

"We ran the numbers and saw what we were spending on hauling trash out in dumpsters, and a lot of it was green trash that could be recycled," McHale adds.

So, the business bought a tub grinder to process that green trash themselves.

"Mostly, it's stuff that comes from projects that we bring back," McHale says of the recyclable material. "If we're cutting down trees, eliminating brush, it's also our grass clippings and leaf debris, the cutbacks from peren-



Kevin McHale (left) says his company, now 40 years old, had its best year in 2020 despite the pandemic.

nials and certainly our flower rotations. Most of our customers have two to three seasonal color rotations in a year, so we bring all that back."

All that organic debris is turned into a natural mulch that McHale Landscape Design then uses at customers' homes, passing the savings on to them.

"We would use it on certain properties, far out and away from the house where it's really used for nutrient and horticultural benefits and not really aesthetics," McHale says. "It's a savings for the client. We also use it at our 40-acre nursery and incorporate it into the soil along with some leaf grow we made with all of our leaf debris. Our maintenance division brings in quite a bit of leaf litter every year."

In the last decade since starting the recycling program, McHale says it continues to prove itself a worthwhile investment.

"By the end of the first year, we saw a lot of progress," he says. "It's turned into a real good approach to be green, and it's cut

down on our dumpster expenses by 50%. It seems to have been a win/win for us all the way around."

However, McHale says learning to separate the recyclable material was something crews had to get used to. And the business learned an expensive lesson in what can happen if that step is ignored.

"The one thing we learned the hard way was it doesn't matter how good the machine is and it doesn't matter how good the operator is, if you don't train the crews to separate their trash, all it takes is a piece of stone, or a tool, to get stuck in that tub grinder and then you have a pretty major expense on your hands," he says.

No added labor was needed to operate the tub grinder, as McHale Landscape Design utilizes its existing employee base.

"We've dedicated one of our operations people to operate the tub grinder two days a week, and still perform his duties as a truck driver the other days in a week," McHale says.

McHale advises other companies to consider starting an in-house recycling program – especially if trash expenses are eating way into their profits.

50%

**THE COMPANY  
CUT ITS DUMPSTER  
EXPENSES IN HALF  
WITH IN-HOUSE  
RECYCLING.**



# the Top 100

№ 85 (T)  
McHALE LANDSCAPE DESIGN  
UPPER MARLBORO, MARYLAND



Buying a tub grinder is a sustainable way to also save you and your clients money, but McHale recommends running the numbers to ensure your company can feasibly purchase a big machine and have the space to maintain it.

"We've always tried to keep trash removal at about 0.5% of our revenue," he says. "As long as we can keep it under that, we feel pretty comfortable."

But he does acknowledge that buying a tub grinder may not be feasible for everyone.

"I'd be really careful about running out and buying a big machine unless you've run the numbers," he says. "I think a lot of it has to do with the size of a company and what it costs you to manage your trash expense. For us, we had the space, and we had the personnel."

For smaller companies, McHale suggests stockpiling recyclable material and then renting a tub grinder a few times a year. He

adds that this is something his business still does even with owning one machine already.

"What we're looking at now, as the company is continuing to grow, is bringing in a large rental tub grinder to come in twice a year to help us, because the machine we have now is at its limit," he says.

Regardless of if they decide to rent a tub grinder and create their own natural mulch, McHale urges landscaping companies to reach out to their local landfill.

"Maybe you can separate your recyclable material and work something out with a local landfill or supplier," he says.

Not only are the cost savings to the company and its customers important, but McHale says the environmental benefits are immeasurable.

"We did this initially because cutting our trash expense was our goal, but being part of the green industry, all of us are obligated to be stewards of the environment and we really need to do everything we can to be green...But with the industry we're in, we are the representatives of making sure we limit our waste. Our group has taken this pretty seriously." **L&L**

**"ONE OF OUR PET PEEVES HAS ALWAYS BEEN OUR TRASH REMOVAL LINE ITEM."**

**KEVIN McHALE,**  
company president



# the Top 100

NO 43 • CHENMARK  
PORTLAND, MAINE



“IF YOU’RE  
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SERVICE,  
YOU’RE  
FOCUSED ON  
THE WRONG  
THING. YOU  
SHOULD BE  
FOCUSED ON  
CUSTOMER  
EXCELLENCE.”

PALMER HIGGINS,  
CEO, Mainely Grass

## Back to school

To set themselves apart from competition, Chenmark employees are investing in classes to learn more about all sides of the business.

By Jimmy Miller

**PALMER HIGGINS** and his team at Chenmark have invested heavily in education, though they’re finding opportunities in unconventional ways.

There are plenty of differences between the green and hospitality industries, but one thing that remains the same is a focus on satisfying the clients. Roughly 60 Chenmark employees enrolled in the Ritz-Carlton training program to find out what

sets them apart from other hotel chains nationwide. **Hint:** It’s not just luxury suites or skyline views seen from the windows.

“If you’re focused on customer service, you’re focused on the wrong thing. You should be focused on customer excellence,” Higgins says. “Everyone does customer service, but if you really want to differentiate, you need to shoot for legendary.”

Chenmark ranked No. 43 on the 2021

Top 100 list, earning \$50 million in revenue from 2020. For Higgins – a partner at Chenmark and the CEO of Mainely Grass, one of Chenmark’s several companies – constantly learning about the green industry specifically is essential. Before Chenmark partnered with Mainely Grass, he was a chief operating officer at a company that created Spanish and French textbooks.

But even for employees who have always worked in the green industry, Higgins says educational opportunities are important. The big takeaway from the Ritz-Carlton program was that they needed to raise the bar.

“You’re not just checking a box to resolve a situation – that’s table stakes. That’s not bad, but that’s not good enough,” he says. “What more can I do? What more can we do as a company to go above and beyond?”

**ABOVE:** Chenmark employees have enrolled in several types of educational opportunities.



# the Top 100

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Higgins also saw 51 employees enroll in a turf management course at the University of Massachusetts. Higgins was one of them, and his employees asked him frequently how he was doing. They were all in it together, but they wanted to see if Higgins could earn an A.

"I don't think it wasn't competitiveness in the sense of trying to do better than other people," Higgins says, "but among my management team and I, we certainly had an internal competition."

Due to COVID-19, the classes were held remotely, one of the silver linings of operating amidst a pandemic. Before this year, the drive out to Amherst – where the classes were held at a UMass campus – discouraged many of the employees from enrolling in the class. Only a handful of employees would take the course before the pandemic, but having the ability to log in and learn helped make it more accessible.

Of course, it wasn't just accessibility that intrigued the employees: Chenmark paid for course enrollment and offered a \$1,500 bonus for anyone who completed the course, plus an extra \$2 per hour for anyone who earned an A grade.

It certainly wasn't an easy A. Higgins says the course was a time investment, as it was four classes a week, and each class required roughly three hours of video review outside of class time. Then, once in the class each week, it required an hour-long Q&A discussion on the reviewed material. They also took roughly four quizzes a week.

"The hardest class specifically was probably plant pathology," Higgins says, joking that there are too many Greek words. "That's getting pretty technical into plant disease and mechanisms in which they infect hosts and spread."

Higgins says paying for the courses wasn't an issue for the company despite the pandemic. He added that he was proud to say that no Chenmark companies furloughed or laid off any employees due to COVID-19.

In the future, he says Chenmark will continue to invest in employee education. They're developing an internal training program, and while they're not sure if they'll go back to the UMass classes should they be in person rather than virtual, Higgins says they'll seek out education opportunities regardless.

"At a high level, education is something that I'm going to continue to back pretty strongly, whether it's another crack at turf management or diving into pest control," Higgins says. **L&L**



## Making the grade

51

CHENMARK EMPLOYEES  
WHO ENROLLED  
IN A HORTICULTURE  
CLASS AT UMASS

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ALL EMPLOYEES  
WHO COMPLETED  
THE COURSE  
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## Trust the process

Intermountain Plantings aims to have confident decision-makers at all levels of the company.

By Jimmy Miller

**WITH A RIBBON-CUTTING** ceremony just around the bend, one of Intermountain Plantings' clients urgently needed help.

The customer's grass was already browning. The client had specified they wanted a native type of sod that went against the contractors' best wishes, and ultimately, they were struggling to keep the lawn looking alive.

Erik Kimball, president of the company, says that between labor and new turf prices, the ensuing fix cost the company roughly \$10,000. But satisfying the client was the top priority, not saying "told you so." In the end, they replaced a half-acre of sod.

The decision paid dividends in the long term, leading to four more projects and what Kimball estimates as millions in future revenue.

"Customer service is number one," says Brad Stewart, company CEO. "If there's issues on a site or with our product, whether it's irrigation or plant materials before or after the job is completed, we really do live by the saying 'the customer is always right.'"

Intermountain Plantings ranked No. 79 on the 2021 Top 100 list and earned \$31 million in revenue for 2020. Stewart estimates that the company's been growing at a 20-25% clip annually for the last four years, to the point where the company opened up another branch in Boise, Idaho, just over two

years ago. Much of the plant material the company orders comes through Boise anyway, and the climate and clientele there is similar to the one they've established in Salt Lake City.

But Stewart is the new guy on the block of the company's executive team. Kimball founded the company nearly 30 years ago, and Chad Richards – the vice president of business development – started as a general laborer at Intermountain 11 years ago. Stewart's been there only three years during the company's most profitable era. He attributes the growth largely to the company's emphasis on customer service, not simply having more projects than ever before.

"It shows that hard work pays off," he says. "We take pride in our work. We really are about quality as well as quantity."

The work is not quick – most of Intermountain Plantings' projects take several weeks to years to finish. Work for homebuilders to create housing developments must be quick, and Richards says his employees had to figure out how to ramp up the time it took to finish the job.

"There's a hurdle or a challenge in putting commercial crews in residential landscapes," he says. "(We figured) if they can run those big jobs, they can handle the smaller ones. They've created their own way

on how to be effective and efficient on these projects."

And that's what Kimball prides his company on most: its ability to adapt at any level of the company.

"I feel like if you have people you feel like you have to micromanage, you have the wrong people or the wrong person," Kimball says. "We try to build that in. We tried to build a culture where we can make decisions at the lowest level possible."

Stewart says the company's trust in employees was on full display when a large residential builder was well behind on its own landscaping.

They hired Intermountain Plantings to finish the job in 30 days.

Despite initial skepticism the work could get done, it did. Intermountain Plantings put all divisions of the company to work, and Stewart says it's actions like this that speak volumes to their clients.

"We probably had 60 landscapers on site. It almost looked like they were being driven by an orchestra. They were working together in tune," Stewart says. "We finished the job in the time requested even though it was an unrealistic request. It's things like that where you can go from being a provider to a partner." **L&L**

Intermountain  
Plantings earned  
roughly \$31 million  
in 2020 revenue.



**"WE REALLY  
DO LIVE  
BY THE  
SAYING 'THE  
CUSTOMER  
IS ALWAYS  
RIGHT.'"**

**BRAD STEWART,**  
company CEO





## Encouraging employee longevity

In 2020, AAA Landscape was focused on bringing in new employees and retaining them. **By Kim Lux**

**FOR PHOENIX-BASED** AAA Landscape, COVID-19 compiled with an already difficult labor market meant it was time to make some changes when it came to hiring and recruiting.

Despite this, the company's CFO Greg Gaston says AAA Landscape continued to grow in 2020, as it has for the last several years.

"In August 2020, the company implemented several monetary programs," Gaston says. "They consisted of a new hire and mentor program, whereby both the new hire and mentor/trainer receive a monetary incentive. Additionally, we increased the incentive amount for our new hire referral program."

The company is even considering starting a new perfect attendance pro-

gram. However, before it's put into action, Gaston says they still have to carefully define what "perfect" means.

"Some thought it should be strictly that there must be 100% attendance in order to qualify," he explains. "Some thought that an excused absence shouldn't disqualify an employee. Another issue is whether an employee should be disqualified if they stayed home to care for someone who has COVID-19. The goal is to motivate employees, not have them get upset because the

think their attendance was perfect but our program states differently."

While these programs were not initially budgeted for in 2020, they were still impactful, as they helped boost retention.

**"COMPANIES WHICH AREN'T PROACTIVE MIGHT FACE MANY EMPLOYEE RELATED HURDLES."**

**GREG GASTON, CFO**

"Management at AAA looked at the incentives as something it must do in order to compete and grow," Gaston says. "In order to meet the requirements of our customers, the company must have employees to perform the services."

According to Gaston, money budgeted for recruiting was utilized to start the incentive programs, and while it didn't cover the entirety of the costs, it did help get the programs off the ground.

With labor being an ongoing obstacle for green industry businesses across the country, Gaston recommends looking into incentive programs to entice employees to stay longer.

"Companies which aren't proactive might face many employee related hurdles now and in the very near future," he says. "High turnover typically occurs within the first month. A company needs to give the employee a reason to stay longer."

But before instituting an incentive program, Gaston says taking a hard look at the costs is a good starting point. "A company must calculate the annual cost of the incentive program realistically," Gaston says. "There are times in which the incentives aren't paid because the employee quits before qualifying."

However, more importantly, he recommends looking at the costs of just maintaining your status quo when it comes to recruiting during these tough times.

"The second thing is to calculate the cost not creating a plan," he says. "Once you find and hire an employee, how long will they stay? Having a financial incentive to stay 90 days helps. If the employee stays 90 days, the likelihood of them staying over a year increases significantly."

"The company believes starting the incentive program was definitely the right thing to do for AAA Landscape," Gaston adds.

Beyond establishing the new programs, Gaston says the coronavirus caused another unexpected bright spot in the year by boosting camaraderie among employees.

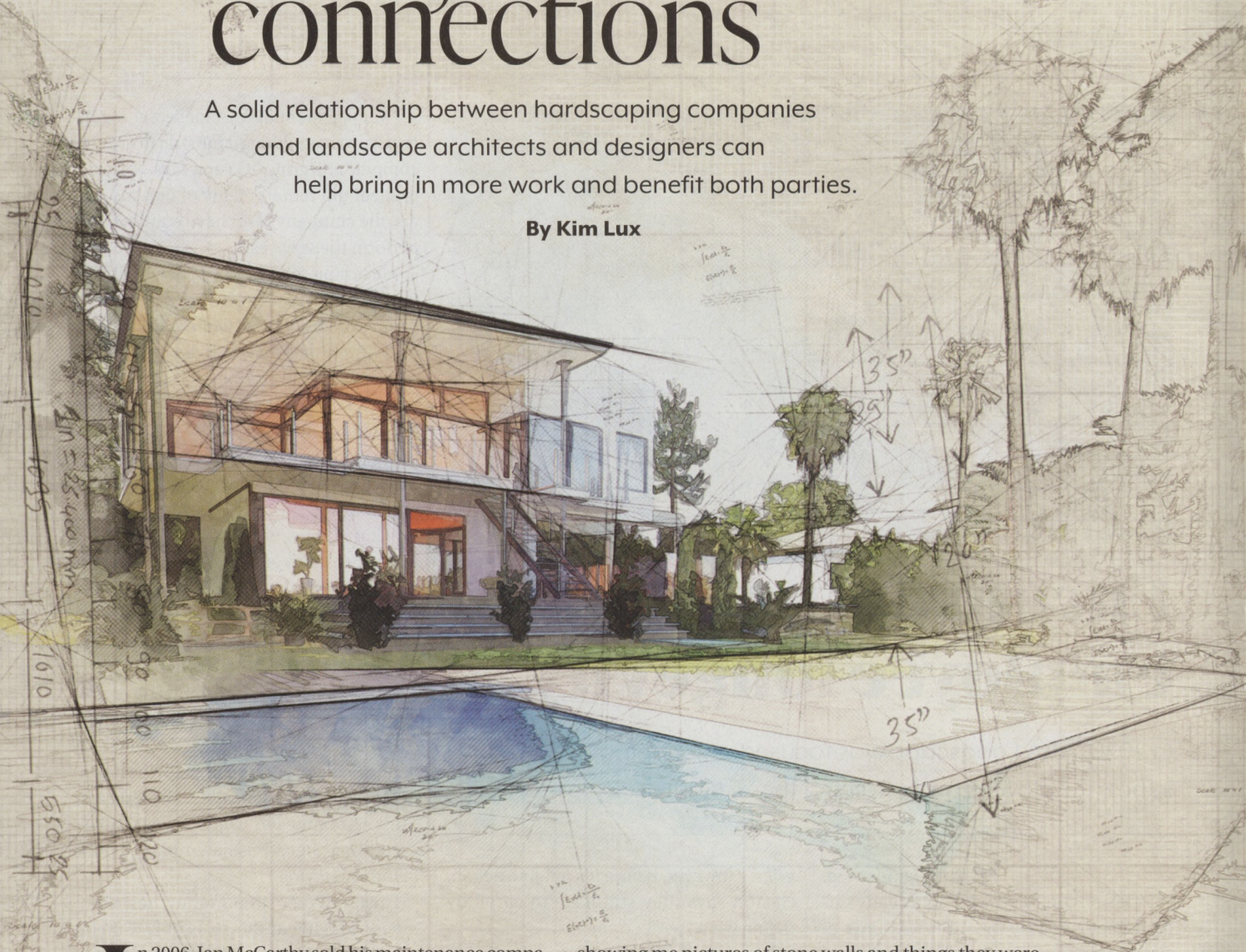
**Continues on pg. 94**



# Building better connections

A solid relationship between hardscaping companies and landscape architects and designers can help bring in more work and benefit both parties.

By Kim Lux



In 2006, Ian McCarthy sold his maintenance company on Cape Cod in order to invest in a professional basketball team. Fast forward to 2016: After living in Canada for six years, McCarthy found himself out of the sports industry and back on Cape Cod.

So, McCarthy went crabbing with a former friend who owned a landscaping company. That friend was looking for senior management within his company and encouraged McCarthy to get back into the industry.

McCarthy went to work for him and oversaw the company's construction department until it was sold about a year later.

Around that same time, McCarthy, who was always close to his employees from his previous company, decided to host a homecoming of sorts to catch up with his old friends.

"I had a reunion at my house with all my former employees that were living in the area," he says. "They were

showing me pictures of stone walls and things they were building, and I thought to myself, 'Wow. The quality is just incredible.' And they kept urging me to start the company again."

All of this led McCarthy to start Blue Claw Associates in 2018. He now serves as the company's president.

"We started with two employees and started with reaching out to landscape architects and sending them flyers," he says. "I built a website that had my old portfolio on it. I also did a job at my parents' house to get the company going. I got a referral for a job here and there, so it was really by word of mouth at the beginning, but I was making contacts with landscape architects."

**GET IN FRONT OF THEM.** As more and more projects came in, McCarthy continued to hire employees who worked with him in the past.



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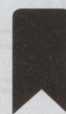
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“When you’re working for one landscape architect, it gives you corporate credibility with others at their level.”

IAN McCARTHY, president of Blue Claw Associates

Then, Blue Claw landed its big break with a \$2 million project on Nantucket Island from a well-known landscape architect.

“I hired some of the masons I used to have working for me. In fact, some of them left companies they’d been with almost 13 years to come back. I took that very seriously,” he says. “We used that project as a way to hire people, but we also were publicizing it on social media. When you’re working for one landscape architect, it gives you corporate credibility with others at their level. It started to open doors for us.”

In order to find landscape architects and designers to partner with, McCarthy says it was up to him to be proactive and seek them out.

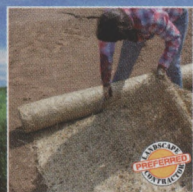
“Initially, I designed a color mailer with lots of imagery on it. And then I wrote cover letters and actually mailed them out



Blue Claw Associates was able to surpass \$2.5 million in its second year by focusing on forming long-term partnerships with independent landscape architects and designers.



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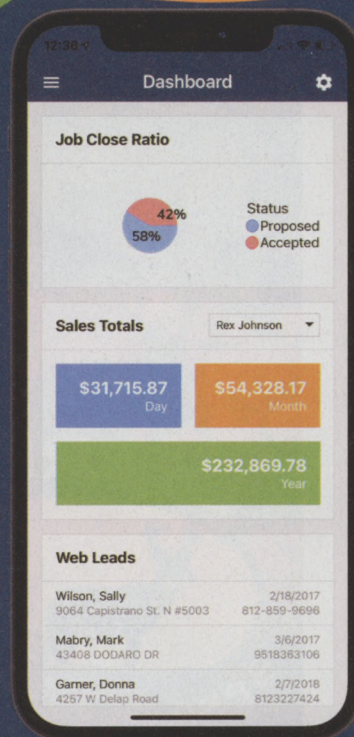
- Carlos Perez, Blue Native Landscape & Irrigation

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to them,” he says. “And then, I did a mass email. I spent painstaking time going to their websites, going to their LinkedIn pages and finding all their contact information. I even built a database for it all.”

McCarthy says keeping an eye out for new construction homes is another way to find partnerships.

“I just went looking for projects,” he says. “If you see a house under construction, you pull over and find out who the builder is. You ask the builder if there’s an opportunity to bid on it and if there’s a landscape architect involved. Then you contact the landscape architect and say, ‘I’m speaking with the builder at this project, and they said you are in charge of picking the contractor. I just wanted to introduce myself and can I send you my portfolio?’”

Social media also turned out to be a



Ian McCarthy says his business showcases its work on social media, particularly Instagram, to connect with local landscape architects.

wonderful way for McCarthy to find people to partner with.

“Being able to post things on Instagram and finding landscape architects in my area and following them, inevitably they’re going to follow you back because you’re in

their industry,” McCarthy says. “And then they follow your work, so in a few months when you go to reach out to them, they say, ‘Oh I know your work’ or ‘I’ve seen your projects.’ It makes that warm introduction much more feasible.”

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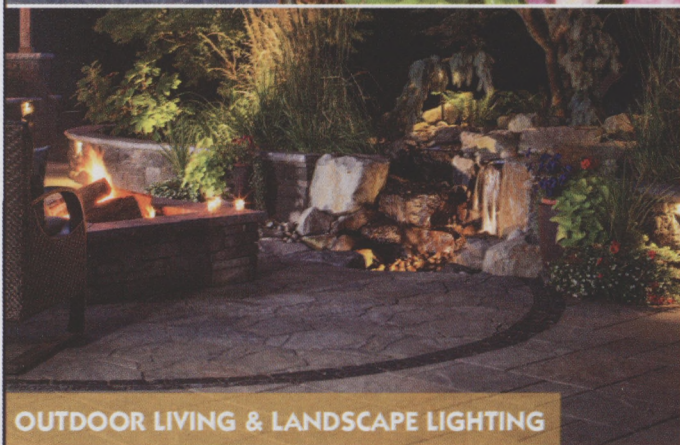


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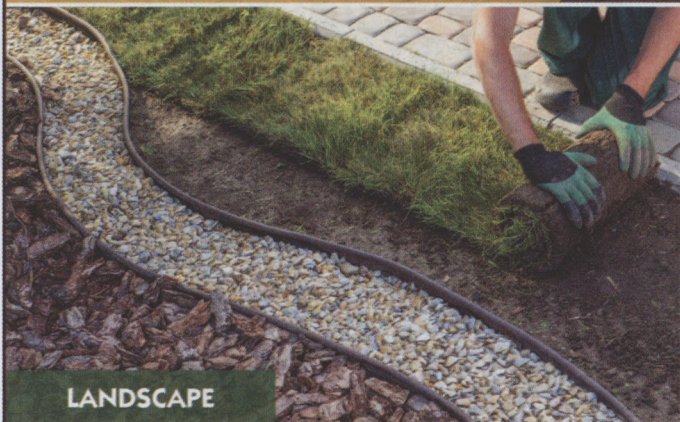
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McCarthy suggests identifying the architects and designers you want to work with and then follow everyone they follow on social platforms. He says this will get you on their radar and help you see what they're looking for in a contractor.

"We try and attack it from all different angles," McCarthy says of finding collaborators. "But, once we do a job with them, then we consider that we're in a partnership with them going forward."

**PERKS OF THE PARTNERSHIP.** In the past four years, Blue Claw Associates has established relationships with a core group of about a dozen landscape architects and designers.

"For us, it's a much better model, because we're just maintaining that relationship with the architect," McCarthy says. "We al-



McCarthy says staying in constant contact with the architect on the pace of a project is also key to forming a lasting partnership.

ways make them look good to their client."

McCarthy adds the process is pretty simple.

"So, they'll design a project for a homeowner...and once the design is done, the client asks who will install it and they say, 'I've got a great company I work with called

Blue Claw Associates.' Most of the time I get a job... I've never met the homeowner until maybe halfway through the job."

McCarthy says having these partnerships also allows his company to weed out more undesirable prospects who, unbeknownst to you, may just be gather-



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(This work is) much more interesting than being a company who sells the same thing over and over again. We get to do all sorts of exciting things."

IAN MCCARTHY, president of Blue Claw Associates

ing quotes from a multitude of businesses.

"If someone's already spent between \$5,000 to \$50,000 on a design, they're invested in doing the project," he says.

"Coming through this avenue, it lets you know they're really going to do the project rather than someone who's calling around and getting 10 prices."

By working with various architects and designers, McCarthy says things don't tend to get stale, either.

"It's almost like getting a present every time a new plan comes," he says. "You want to open it up and see if this one has an infinity pool, or really cool outdoor kitchen or fireplace. It makes it much more interesting than being a company who sells the same thing over and over again. We get to do all sorts of exciting things."

Because Blue Claw Associates doesn't offer design work, McCarthy says these relationships are mutually beneficial.

"It gives us the opportunity, when clients call us, we can refer them to one of our partners," he says. "So now we're giving them business, and that strengthens our bond. It's a symbiotic partnership."

And while those partnerships grow, so does the trust between the two parties.

"Along the way, if they get comfortable with our crews and our quality of work, that's less time they have to babysit our project," McCarthy says. "They can go out and find their next client."

**NURTURE THE CONNECTION.** Once relationships with architects and designers are established, fostering them is brought to the forefront of things.

"That's the secret sauce – you can get in the door with them, but you can lose them really quickly," McCarthy says. "In the beginning, if you don't execute the job properly then that'll be your last opportunity with them."

Besides producing high-quality work, McCarthy says it all comes down to respect. For instance, if problems do arise during a job, McCarthy says it's important to respond as a unified front with the architect as opposed to playing the blame game.

"If I find mistakes they've made, I usually just say, 'Don't worry about it' or 'I'll fix it' without exposing them," he says. "Where, if we weren't in that long-term relationship with them, a typical contractor might say, 'That's the architect's fault – not my fault.' But we never want to put that blame on them because we want the long-term relationship."

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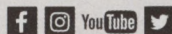


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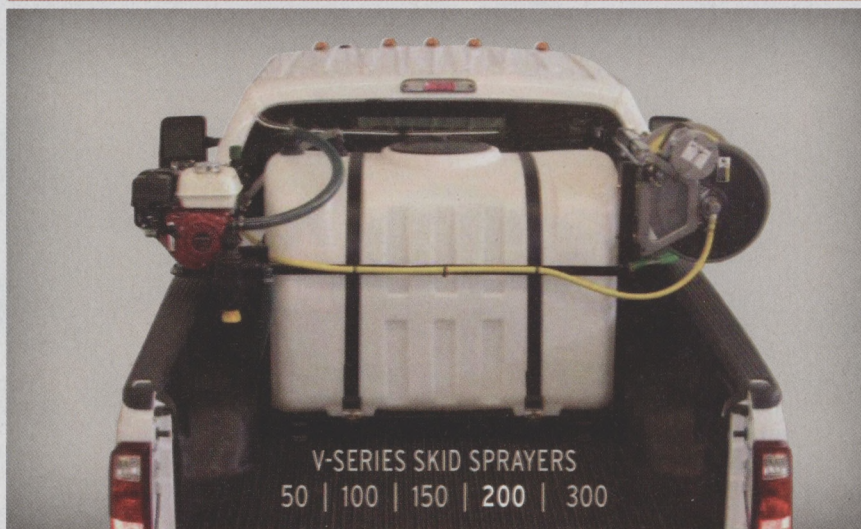
Knowing how to talk the talk also helps foster those relationships. "It's really a recipe to our success to speak the language they speak and put their fears aside that

we're not going to compete with them in any way," McCarthy says.

McCarthy says he learned how land-

Continues on pg. 94

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Showing off photos of the finished project to a landscape client is easy and key to building those relationships, but what's equally important is keeping the jobsite clean and organized throughout the scope of the work.

"That's a point of differentiation between companies," McCarthy says.

McCarthy adds that he learned this lesson early on from a business developer he worked with that, while architects and their clients will remember how great the project looked when it was finished, they'll also remember what it looked like along the way.

"I was focused on getting the job done and showing them a picture at the end of it looking great," McCarthy says. "But he said how it looks at the end is important, but even more important is how the process goes throughout the job."

With Cape Cod being an iconic summer destination spot, McCarthy says clients oftentimes rent homes nearby while theirs are being worked on.

"Someone could drive up on a completely messy and unorganized site and that reflects on you," he says. "They'll come by in the summer and walk through the site with a glass of wine trying to envision how amazing their property is going to look when it's all done. And if you have cigarette butts, coffee cups and tools scattered everywhere, that's just a negative association with your company."

"Throughout the process, if the homeowners (are) annoyed but at the end of the job you make it look good, are they going to be completely happy?" McCarthy adds. "No, they're still going to be annoyed about how the job went."

And the best way to keep this from occurring is to establish a clean-up routine.

"Train your crews about how to put things away," McCarthy says. He also suggests using caution tape and orange fencing to indicate any safety hazards, which is another element to the end of day routine.

At Blue Claw Associates, McCarthy says it ultimately falls on the foreman to confirm all the boxes are checked when crews stop for the day.

"Each crew has a foreman who is responsible for keeping their site organized and making sure everything is put away in an enclosed trailer," he says.



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From left, Patrick Hawkins, Michelle Hawkins and Missy Fromme took over the family business 12 years ago.

## Relative changes

It stays in the family at Lawn Cure, which has greatly reduced its employee turnover by making a few key changes. **By Kim Lux**



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Lawn Cure, based in Sellersburg, Indiana, was started in 1978 by Larry Messina with just one truck. Twelve years ago, sisters Michelle Hawkins and Missy Fromme took over as co-owners of their father's company.

While the women were aiming to keep the company running exactly how their father had, Michelle's husband, Patrick Hawkins, who joined as president and general manager, was eager to make changes.

Today, the company employs 21 people, has 16 trucks in its fleet and its revenue is \$3 million.

"Before I took over the business, I spent 20-plus years in the transportation business," Patrick says. "So, when I took over here, one of the biggest issues they were having was rate of pay. What they were paying the drivers was very low, and

that in turn caused massive turnover. The turnover rate was probably 40% and you can't run a business with 40% turnover."

Patrick increased the pay by up to 25% and says they budgeted for the increase by raising rates.

They also looked for ways to consolidate costs and changed the way they bought their chemicals.

"I changed all the payroll, how we pay and how we start, different types of progressions," he adds. "And at first, I got a lot of pushback from the other two owners about doing it. Now, they look back on it and understand why we did it."

Patrick says it was especially difficult working with his wife and having these disagreements.

"It has not been easy being married and running a multi-million-dollar business

and telling your wife, 'No you're not doing this,'" he says. "But they learned to trust me, and I learned to trust them."

Michelle says what's made things easier for her and her husband is leaving any argument at the office.

"There've been conflicts between Pat and me, but we try to not bring it home," she says. "Overall, we try to move past things."

Nowadays, Fromme says the three are better at having open, honest discussions but still agree to disagree on some things. They've learned to trust one another's strengths.

Fromme is vice president of finance and handles the budgets, accounting and taxes. Michelle is vice president of operations and takes care of the customer service and marketing. And Patrick manages the trucks, crews and day-to-day operations.

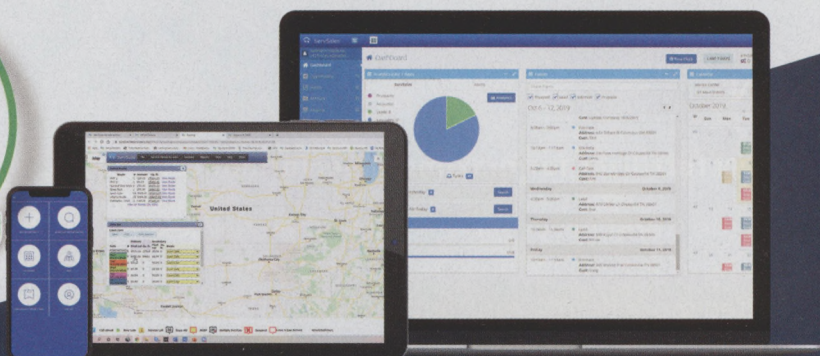


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“They give me the work that I need that’s quality service and I let them leave a couple hours early. They absolutely love it.”

PATRICK HAWKINS president and general manager

**CREATING A CARING CULTURE.** One part of the payroll change was implementing a four-day workweek. Crews work four 10-hour days Monday through Thursday.

“It’s more time with their families. A lot of them travel, and it allows them to expand their vacation time,” he says. “If I gave my employees a survey and said, ‘Would you rather I pay you one or two dollars more an hour but you’ve got to go back to a five-day workweek or keep the four days,’ they will keep the four days 100%.”

While weather obviously plays a factor in all outdoor work, Patrick says he only remembers a handful of times when crews had more than one rain day in a week.

“If we have a complete rain out, they just work Friday as the makeup day,” he says, adding that crews never work on weekends. “If we were to have two rain

outs in one week, we’ll either have a shop day and do maintenance or just make it up at a later day.”

Michelle says that when Patrick first decided to switch to the four-day workweek, she and her sister were worried customers wouldn’t get on board and go elsewhere.

Patrick says the transition was fairly seamless and the company only had a few dozen customers who had to switch dates.

Fromme adds the new schedule is just better for their employees’ health.

“It’s a very physical job,” she says. “It wears on your body. We appreciate that and are aware that they need some rest time and time to be with their families. You can work your people to death, but you’re not going to keep them long.”

And the shorter workweek isn’t the only thing the three are doing to give employees

more time with their families.

“Each day every technician has their route board, and they work from 7 a.m. to 5 p.m.,” Patrick says. “We’ve allowed them, through hard work, that once they clear their board for the day, they can go home. So, basically, most of them are getting their work done by 3 p.m. and are leaving for the day. I still pay them for a 10-hour day. They give me the work that I need that’s quality service and I let them leave a couple hours early. They absolutely love it. We’ve been doing it since June.”

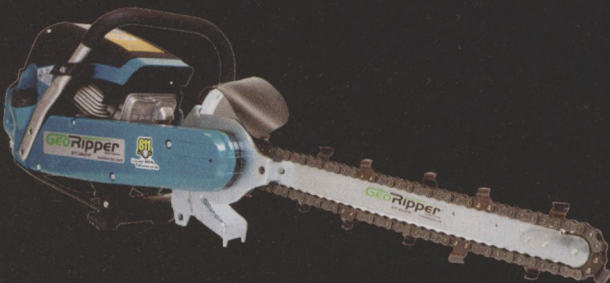
But, if employees finish their routes early, they have the option to work ahead.

“We instituted a commission program, and we call it ‘Bank Hours,’” Patrick says. “We went out and engineered every route, so every route knows on a daily 10-hour day what they’re supposed to spray. So, if



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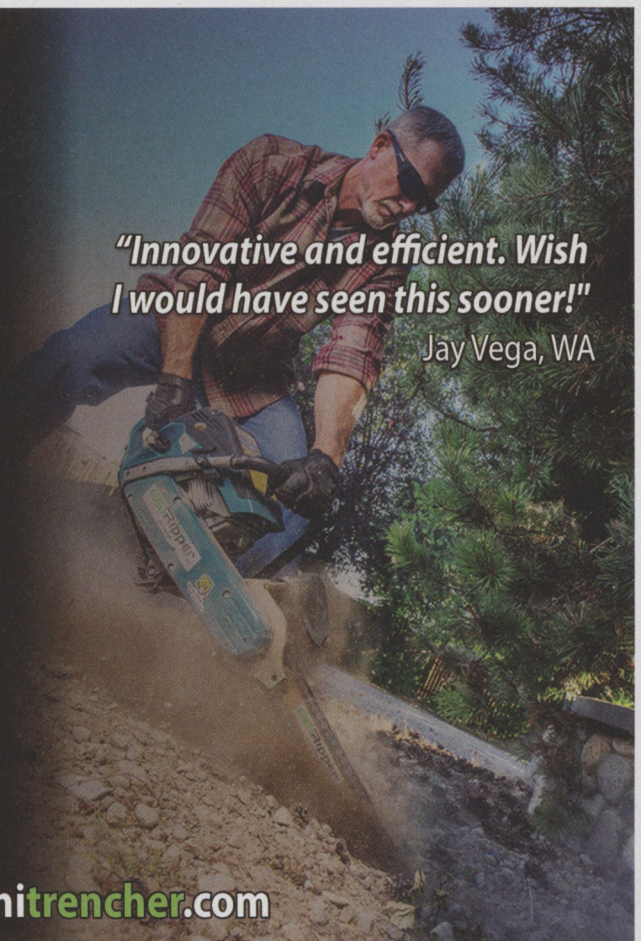
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**SHOW THEM YOU CARE.** Lawn Cure makes sure to provide incentives, like bonuses and extra days off, to keep employees motivated.

they spray above and beyond that, I pay them more money because that's extra work they did for me."

Patrick explains that most technicians end the week with an additional eight to 10 hours, which they can do what they like with. "They can cash that out and instead of getting a 40-hour check, they'll get a 50-hour check. Some will use it to take extra days off," he says.

Others choose to save the time for the yearly seven-week paid layoff period. That way, they have an additional two or three checks during the offseason.

Other incentives for the crews include catered lunches, extra days off around holidays like Memorial Day and bonuses.

"Recently, we gave all employees an extra \$200 bonus just because they did a great job with the aeration and seeding

season. It sounds small, but to them it means a lot," Patrick says.

Fromme and Michelle add that the reasoning behind the bonuses is two-fold as they are a way to show crews their appreciation and they help with retention. They say the company has seen very little turnover in the last few years. Currently, the company's turnover rate is lower than 10% and Patrick says an average tech's tenure is about six years and growing.

"It's all those small things that create that culture," Patrick says. "You've got to find what works for your business and what your employees value."

"We truly care about our people," Fromme says. "We don't really think of them as employees, but an extended part of our family. And we try to treat people the way we'd like to be treated as an employee."

In fact, Lawn Cure's first employee, hired by Larry Messina, is still with the company.

"Jeff Smith has been with us over 40 years and he's like a big brother to us," Michelle says. "I have memories of Jeff, who's still our service manager and was our dad's first employee, taking us to school in the truck and then he'd go start his route."

**CONTROLLED GROWTH.** Having a family-oriented culture has certainly allowed Lawn Cure to grow, but Patrick, Michelle and Fromme have no plans to expand services.

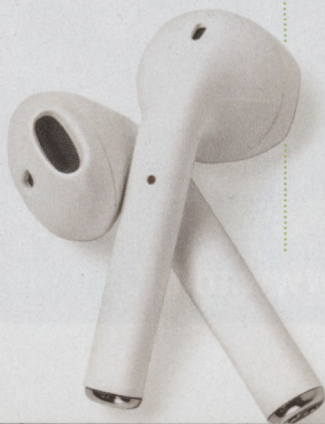
"When our dad started in lawn care in the mid-70s, it was a new thing and he really saw the potential in that kind of service," Fromme says. "One of core things he always believed in was that you need to do something very well and if you keep branching out into all these different



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## PROFILE



Since its inception, Lawn Cure has gone from one truck to a fleet of 16 vehicles and 21 employees.

things, and you get spread so thin, then you lose sight of what you do well. If you have that core business you truly care about, and focus on being the best you can be, then that's how you can be really successful."

Currently, the company is running about 15 trucks per day, and Patrick says they'd never add a service their trucks weren't equipped for. In addition to lawn care, the company provides chemical tree and shrub services, pest control and mosquito control.

"There's been a lot of people who've asked us to do a lot of things over the years, but if it doesn't fit how our trucks are set up, I usually will not do it," he says. "We want our techs to concentrate on those three or four things we do best."

And Patrick says their market in southern Indiana and Louisville has enough potential growth to sustain them.

"We have a wonderful business. Nobody is getting filthy rich here, but we have a very, very nice living," he says. "So, we like to have our growth controlled. We know that if we would dump more money into marketing, or expand other services, we could grow another half or three quarters of a million every year. It's just not what we want for our family business."



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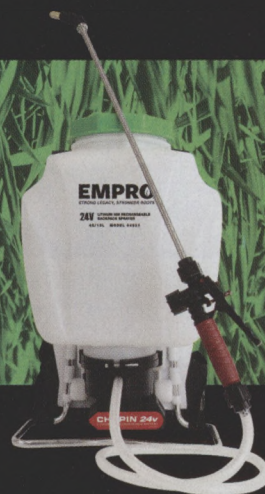
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The trio is looking forward to taking a step back one day and passing the business onto the next generation.

“Young people do things a lot differently than we do. And I think it’s important to embrace some of that.”

**MISSY FROMME** vice president of finance

**FROM ONE TRIO TO ANOTHER.** Back when the sisters took over the business, they say it was the right move for their growing families.

“When Missy and I both came in we both had little kids,” Michelle says. “We were able to job share and share the babysitting... she would work in the morning and I would have all the kids. And then we’d transition. I could get up from the desk and she could sit down at the desk and take right over. We were just that in sync with one another.”

Michelle and Patrick have three children: Katy, Jack and Mady Hawkins. Fromme, and her husband, Bob, have two daughters – Savannah and Sydney Fromme.

“All those babies we used to watch are growing up now and in college,” Michelle says.

Three of those kids are now looking to make their mark in the family business.

“Jack is getting a business degree and wants to come into the business and take it over long-term, which is fantastic,” Patrick says. “Katy wants to take over as

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well, and Savannah is absolutely brilliant. Between Jack, Katy and Savannah, it's almost the spitting image of me, Missy and Michelle."

Fromme says she's eager to get their input and believes they can bring a new, fresh perspective to things.

"Young people do things a lot differ-

ently than we do," Fromme says. "And I think it's important to embrace some of that... you have to embrace the way the next generation thinks or you're going to be left behind."

Patrick says they have plenty to teach the young ones – especially a few lessons he learned early on.

"You've got to have patience in this business, and you've got to listen to your customers," he says. "But, with a business our size, you're going to lose customers. That's just how it is. That was a struggle for me in my first few years...you've got to learn that it's the nature of our business and to look at the overall picture."

Michelle hopes the children will work as seamlessly as her, Fromme and Patrick have.

"I don't know if there will be issues down the road – you hope everything will go smoothly," she says. "Obviously, you're never going to agree all the time. Family dynamics can be tough, but it's important to leave any kind of ego at the door."

Meanwhile, while they wait for the next generation to join them, Lawn Cure's headquarters is bursting at the seams.

"We are about maxed out on space here," Michelle says. "We have a 14,000 square-foot building and we cannot fit anymore trucks in here. We're so cramped in, so we'll expand."

They've already secured a vacant lot next to their existing building, which they'll use to grow. Down the road, Michelle says they'd like to consider a satellite office and adding a few technicians to expand the service area.

Patrick says their reputation and customer service will allow them to continue growing the business.

"We set out a plan on how we wanted to grow the business, and it's tripled in size and volume within the last 10 years," he says. "Our customer service is impeccable. If someone calls with a complaint, we're on their lawn the next day, sometimes the same day. And the customers love that. I'll probably do 50,000 applications this year, and our service calls with complaints and issues are nothing." **L&L**

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## Betting on the right chips

From dyed mulch to a more organic approach,  
the industry's latest trends are diverse.

By Jimmy Miller

**With clients working from home** and spending time in their backyard rather than the Bahamas, Laurie Broccolo noticed she fielded more questions this year.

COVID-19 might have kept people out of the office and away from vacation destinations, so Broccolo – the owner of Broccolo Tree & Lawn Care – found her customers were far more engaged than usual. Out in the field, they came out to talk to her employees during lunch. And back at their garden center, clients filtered in all day long rather than in the evenings.

And with that extra attention, every small detail became magnified, including their mulch.

“People were really interested, and they had the time,” she says. “They were working from home, and they needed those breaks. People are actually seeing their plants.”

To help those plants grow and to make garden colors pop, mulch and groundcovers are an essential factor for landscapers to consider. Here are some of the latest trends that industry experts have noticed.

**KEEPING IT NATURAL.** Bob Scott from Lowe’s Landscaping in Chagrin Falls, Ohio, says it should come as no surprise, but most of his clients are on “the organic train.”

Some raise concerns about the overall well-being of the environment. Others ask if there are chemicals in the mulch that’ll be bad for their kids, or how worried they should be if their dog eats some of the mulch. He estimates that roughly 75% of the mulch they put down for clients is natural, and from a retail end, customers buy it at an even higher rate.



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"I think it all starts from a good place," Scott says. "'Hey, I never want to make my lawn or yard look a little better at the risk of my dog or kid getting sick.' And now that it's caught on, it's becoming a trend."

Scott says Lowe's Landscaping – which has about 60 employees and earns roughly \$4 million a year – is often selling its triple shred mulch for that very reason. And during the pandemic, they've received more calls for DIYers and saw a slight uptick in installation on the residential side, so he had more conversations with clients than ever about their desire to keep it green. Even their dyed products are made with a carbon dye, he says, to keep things as healthy as possible.

"The more natural, the more organic, the better," Scott says. "That's the overarching theme."

Broccolo says that in Rochester, New York, her company is pushing undyed, natural products as much as they can. It's just a bit of an uphill battle.

"It's interesting. Pretty much everybody likes the dyed black," Broccolo says. "We do try and sell undyed, natural, as much as possible. We steer our clients that way. I can't give in and buy any of the red."

That dyed black and red is a trend that hasn't gone away at all. Even for Scott, who sells largely natural mulch, the dyed black mulch is "far and away" his number-two seller.

**COLOR IT IN.** Christopher Clark with Cut Above Landscaping in North Billerica, Massachusetts, says his company does just about every service a landscaper can offer.

With \$750,000 in revenue last year and

eight employees, 70% of Cut Above's clientele comes from the residential side. Clark has seen customers start to buy the dyed products because of the curb appeal, though it's a recent trend that hadn't been prevalent in northern Massachusetts before.

"Personally, I like pure hemlock, but it's almost hard to find. Everything's color-enhanced nowadays. The black mulch has seemed to be newer in our area," Clark says. "It's just a different color. Sometimes, the color does make green grass pop a little more."

Scott says some of his clients like that the dyed products tend to last a little longer and not disappear like some of the finer, more natural mulches. And Broccolo says people like the dyed products because it's showy and contrasts nicely against the grass. While the brown mulch looks

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# “The plants are the stars. The mulch is just there to accent the plants.”

lovely, it doesn't grab someone's eye while driving past.

But Broccolo says this isn't the way she thinks about it.

“The plants are the stars,” Broccolo says. “The mulch is just there to accent the plants.”

**MORE THAN MULCH.** Groundcovers and stone are another way to accent a landscape, though stone is more widely used in commercial applications, Broccolo says. She's also seen some younger DIY gardeners in her area request stone as well.

But Clark says the value of low-maintenance stone like washstone or aggregates can't be overlooked.

“Stone, depending on the type, can save a lot of money,” Clark says. “You don't need to do it every year.”

Meanwhile, Broccolo has seen clients

request pollinator plants or edibles to fill in spaces in their gardens. Scott says groundcovers like pachysandra or creeping myrtle help him transition many of his clients' yards from lawn to the wooded areas nearby. Sweet woodruff and bugleherbs also remain popular.

With most of her clients home, Broccolo says they weren't only asking questions –

they were seeing areas of their lawns that weren't doing well. With that, they wanted answers fast.

“We're always recommending assertive plants that will fit in pretty quickly, like low-growing shrubs, natives, pollinator plants, even perennial geraniums,” she says. “They grow tall enough to keep the weeds out, and they grow fast enough to fill in the holes.” **L&L**

**LAURIE BROCCOLO**, owner of Broccolo Tree & Lawn Care



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# GETTING ATTACHED TO MOWER ATTACHMENTS




With the right attachment in the right application, lawn maintenance contractors can use their mowers to deliver additional services from one season to the next.

**By Gregg Wartgow**



**MORE OPPORTUNITIES.** Having a variety of attachments at your disposal can help you increase your client base.



**L**awn maintenance contractors have numerous mower attachments at their disposal, but a few stand out for their potential to drive both productivity and sales.

**DETHATCHING DURING SPRING CLEANUP.** In Fort Atkinson, Wis., Rob Amadon of Rock River Lawn Care has been using an easy-to-install dethatcher on his front-mount zero-turn mower. This attachment simply hangs on the front of the deck.

"The way it is set up, I dethatch and mow at the same time," Amadon says. "For the first pass over a lawn, I set the deck to around 3.5 inches with the dethatcher attached. Then I lift the dethatcher off, drop the deck a half-inch, and go over the lawn one more time. The mower's integrated grass-catching system sucks everything up."

Spring dethatching is a natural service add-on for existing maintenance customers. Amadon approaches it differently, though. Almost all of his spring dethatching customers are people he does not mow for.

Since Amadon catches his grass clippings, the properties he mows do not have heavy thatch buildup. So Amadon tends to pick up dethatching customers who use mowing contractors that do not bag. That's an entirely new income stream to help kick off the season.

Up in the Northeast, spring dethatching is also a great opportunity for lawn maintenance contractors. Manny Carlino, owner of M&R Landscape & Design in Westfield, N.J., never had much luck with manufacturer-supplied dethatching units, though. So, he created his own.

"I found that the dethatching unit that hangs on the front of the mower deck had really stiff tines," Carlino says. "It did a good job of raking the lawn maybe too good. When we used them, they really scratched into the soil and kicked up a lot of dirt. A lot of that dirt got ingested into the blower fan on the mower which caused all kinds of problems."

Carlino rigged up an alternative roughly 10 years ago. His crews have been using it ever since. The homemade dethatching attachment consists of six 24-inch leaf rake heads mounted to a frame made of square stock metal.

That frame attaches to a bracket that mounts on the front of the mower deck. The rake heads are positioned so that the shaft would be pointing

away from the front of the mower. This allows the rake heads to rake the lawn while the mower drives forward.

"This does an excellent job of raking without kicking up so much dirt," Carlino says. "The dethatcher can be easily raised and lowered as needed by a rope from the operator's seat."

To be precise, Carlino says his creation really can't be referred to as a dethatcher. It is just a highly efficient, mower-propelled rake.

"We perform this service for all of our customers during spring cleanups," Carlino says. "The attachment rakes up all the little gumballs and sticks that the mower won't suck up. The tiny sticks get stuck in the tines. So, when the mower operator gets to one end of the lawn, he lifts the rake with the rope and gives it a little shake, so the sticks fall out."

"When the raking is completed, another employee goes out and manually rakes up those two windrows of sticks. We've never found a more efficient way to clean up a lawn in the spring."

**FALL LEAVES AND AERATION.** Rick Roulo, owner of Lawn Beautician in Hopewell, Va., says he could never find a bagging attachment that worked well with a riding mower. The wet leaves he needed to clean up in the fall kept clogging the chutes. A highly skilled mechanic, Roulo even tried rigging up some contraptions of his own. After a couple years of repeated trial and error, he gave up on the idea of bagging leaves with a mid-mount zero-turn.

"I decided that the most efficient way to do leaf cleanup was to get them into piles and suck them up with a big leaf vac," Roulo says. Roulo's crews tried walk-behind blowers, which worked very well. A better method proved to be a mower-mounted blade. "It was important that the blade was heavy-duty and could spring back a little, just like a snowplow," Roulo says.

Roulo looks to one other mower attachment to help deliver fall services. Once again, after a lot of trial and error with different styles, he settled on a pull-behind drum aerator.

"We provide aeration services to the majority of our customers," Roulo says. "By pulling a drum aerator behind a mower, we actually mow and aerate at the same time. So, we don't really have any additional labor involved with aeration, at least on our large-acreage properties where we use the pull-behind."



“We’ve never found a more efficient way to clean up a lawn in the spring.”

MANNY CARLINO, owner of M&R Landscape & Design

Additionally, Roulo says his pull-behind drum aerators are low-cost.

“They are just big barrels filled with water,” Roulo says. “The tines themselves are core-type spikes. These aerators run and run and don’t seem to break. Other aerator attachments I’ve tried only lasted a few years.

“But these aerator barrels we use now will last until you’re dead. The design is just really simple. The only moving parts are two bearings. If a spike happens to break off, which is pretty rare, you can just weld it right back on.”

**SNOW REMOVAL.** Back up in Wisconsin, Amadon gets additional mileage out of his mower during the winter. He mounts a snowblower to his front-mount mower to make faster work of residential driveways.

“To make this work, it was really important to find a snowblower that was just the right size,” Amadon says. “With many of my residential accounts, quite a bit of sidewalk goes with the driveway. A lot of commercial-grade snowblower attachments are at least 60 inches. The one I use is only 42 inches, which is perfect for sidewalks.”

#### WEIGHING ATTACHMENT ALTERNATIVES.

Josh Doeber, owner of Atlantic Landscape Management in Chesapeake, Va., had used various mower attachments earlier in his career. But as of late, he just uses dedicated machines to dethatch, aerate and seed.

“We are performing those types of services for a lot of clients now,” Doeber says. “We prefer the convenience of just loading a dedicated machine onto a trailer. Taking

attachments on and off all of the time can be a hassle.”

In the event that add-on services are performed intermittently, Doeber says renting could be a good option. Attachments require storage space, which a landscape contractor may not have. Renting a durable, dedicated machine could prove to be the most productive and cost-effective solution.

Productivity and cost-effectiveness are what it all comes down to. Sometimes a mower attachment is the answer – especially if it lets you put a mower back into production during “off” times of year.

More importantly, if an attachment helps you deliver services better, faster and more efficiently, there is no stronger argument to be made for having it. **L&L**

The author is a freelance writer based in Wisconsin.

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# G Breaking round-

## Gearing Up Your Irrigation Operation

The right equipment and tools for an installation job gives crews the power to work efficiently and deliver quality work.

By Kristen Hampshire

Equipment is easier to acquire than quality labor, and it can even retain the good people you have by giving them the torque and tools to complete potentially back-breaking jobs efficiently. “Any time a piece of equipment can cut down labor, it’s worth buying,” says Joe Swett, CEO, Sunrise Irrigation, Palm Harbor, Fla.

Swett operates a mostly residential irrigation business, and because of fence gates, property sizes and topography – tree roots and such – his team relies on trenchers as the “labor” that can cut through tough ground while keeping jobs on time and on budget.

“Everything we put on a crew is based on efficiency, and whatever we can do to save labor and get a quality job done faster,” Swett says. “For us, open trench has been the way to go.”

Trenchers and vibratory plows (v-plows) are irrigation service staples, and each serves its purpose. Paired with essential hand tools, along with crew training and ongoing maintenance, an operation can leverage equipment to support its team and provide the service clients expect.

**V-PLOW OR TRENCHER?** Sunrise Irrigation’s utility trailers house pedestrian trenchers because Swett explains, “we don’t need massive equipment” since residential properties tend to be close together and allow somewhat limited access to where his team will need to lay pipe or perform repairs.





Selecting which trenchers to add to a fleet can require a bit of “trial and error” to learn what horsepower, torque and boom height is best for a job.

From underground utilities to roots and rocks, “we can open up the ground and see what we’ve got, so it’s easier,” Swett says of using a trencher. His fleet includes three trenchers, two for service and one for installation since 90% of the business is residential irrigation maintenance.

“We can use these and get through a 36-inch fence gate,” he points out.

When selecting which trenchers to add to the fleet, he says it has required a bit of “trial and error” to learn what horsepower, torque and boom height is best for their jobs. “We started with less expensive machines that had lower horsepower, and we finally started tweaking that and finding out what worked for us.”

Swett says digging 2- and 3-feet deep is not necessary for the properties his team services. “So, I don’t need a large boom and I go with a shorter one,” he says. “I also look at horsepower as it relates to the

torque I can get to the teeth. If I need to go through rocks, roots or really thick soil, I’ll opt for a higher horsepower and shorter boom so I can get more torque to the teeth to rip through the ground vs. a longer boom and lower horsepower, which will give you less torque in the ground to tear through material.”

John Newlin, owner, Quality Services, North Ridgeville, Ohio, says, “Trenchers have their place based on the application and size of pipe and project.” His key equipment includes a pipe puller with trencher attachment, and he prefers to use v-plows for installation because there is less settling of the yard.

Commercial Irrigation & Turf also leans toward v-plow for most installation projects, and the Peoria, Ill.-based company serves golf courses and large commercial grounds, along with residential properties. Versatile equipment is the key for this firm.

“As for heavy equipment, we run vibratory plows, trenchers and small boring rigs, so we have different sizes for different applications, and most of our machines are all-in-one,” says Randy Hunsicker, project manager.

On light commercial and residential jobs, Commercial Irrigation & Turf dispatches its 36-inch, diesel-powered walk-behind machine that is center pivot and has a trencher plow on front, v-plow on the back and a rotor borer attachment. “That way you can get underneath sidewalks and driveways,” Hunsicker explains.

With this equipment, the company can install ¾-inch pipe to 2-inch pipe with a v-plow. “With spacers, you can go all the way up to 4-inch pipe with the trencher, as well,” he says, noting that the company mostly uses 1- to 1½-inch pipe for residential projects and 1- to 4-inch pipe for commercial jobs. The company owns five of these multi-use machines.

For large commercial projects, the company uses larger equipment with a small backhoe on front for excavation. “We have two of those with v-plows and one that is a trencher,” he says of the combo package.

When breaking ground, Commercial Turf & Irrigation tries to use a v-plow in most circumstances. “It’s your best bet for cleanup,” Hunsicker says. “When you trench, you have to backfill and there is settling that can happen over time, while a v-plow lifts the ground up a little and you hardly see any settling.”

He also prefers a v-plow for pulling in pipe.

“The only time trench vs. using a v-plow is if we are putting wire and multiple pipes in a ditch,” Hunsicker says. “Then, we want an open ditch so there is more access for laying multiple products.”

Trenching provides more access for repairs in some cases. “You can trench and work more easily without digging up pipe to glue on fittings – you can do everything in the ditch and lay multiple pipes, which is harder with a v-plow and not really recommended,” Hunsicker says.

Going back to labor savings, Hunsicker emphasizes how unnecessary cleanup after



installation can stall a crew's efficiency. "Cleanup time takes away from the actual work," he says, explaining why he prefers to assign v-plows to projects whenever possible. "We want to make sure the property looks great after installation, and for minimal cleanup, we try to use the smallest piece of equipment possible that is still very capable of doing what is required," he says. "We want the smallest footprint machine that will not tear up the ground too much and take away from the main part of the job."

**ESSENTIAL HAND TOOLS.** A selection of shovels and rakes are essential hand tools for performing irrigation work. As Swett points out, "It's the basics." His crews are equipped with pony shovels, flat shovels for cleanup, rock rakes and chainsaws for tearing through roots, if necessary.

Newlin's team uses a German-made pneumatic hand shovel. "It is great when dealing with compacted soils," he says, adding that other basic hand tools "are the norm" and include steel shovels, hard rakes and tampers.

"You want a trenching shovel that is comfortable to use," Hunsicker adds. "It used to be a flat spade and you had to chip away the ground, where now there are more curved trenching shovels that help dig a ditch no wider than you need." These trenching shovels are available in 4-, 5- and 6-inch widths, he says.

"If you were to Google, the most common shovel would be a round-point," Hunsicker says, noting that he thinks these typically 8-inch shovels dig up more ground than necessary for most jobs.

"You're excavating more than you need to run irrigation pipe," he says. "So, the trenching shovel is more efficient because you are not digging such a wide area, and most of the time, we are digging 5 inches wide vs. 8 to 9 inches like you'd do with a round-point shovel."

**TRAINING & MAINTAINING.** Equipment is only as good as the crewmember who's running the machine – how they use it and

"We hire some with agricultural backgrounds and they usually know how to run the equipment."

**RANDY HUNSICKER**, project manager at Commercial Irrigation & Turf

maintain it. Training is essential for safe, efficient operation and for equipment longevity. Swett starts his people with learning projects on the company's own property. "We do a test section in our yard and shop and operate the equipment, digging trenches in a controlled environment to learn how to properly use the equipment and not tear up grass with the tracks," he says, noting that pivoting track-wheel equipment can disrupt the turf and result in a frustrated customer and more "repair work" for the crew.

Hands-on training comes after team members learn safety and basic machine anatomy in a classroom environment. "We discuss how to operate it and the depths we trench," Swett says.

Training at Sunrise Irrigation happens weekly, and sometimes more frequently. During this time, they also discuss maintenance. "We tighten chains every day and stay on top of the preventive maintenance cycle," Swett says. "The biggest things are changing oil, which we do religiously, and we do our 100-hour service at around 65 to 75 hours because of the type of environment the equipment is in."

"It's cheaper to change oil than a piece of machinery," Swett says.

Training at Commercial Irrigation & Turf is also hands-on and customized to the team member's skill level. "We hire some with agricultural backgrounds and they usually know how to run the equipment," Hunsicker says. "Some never want to run the equipment and prefer to do the labor or plumbing side of the job."

On most jobs, the foreman runs heavy equipment and teaches crewmembers as they gain more experience. Operating equipment begins with basics. Hunsicker says, "We start simple with flat ground."

Equipment is greased daily, oil is checked before starting equipment each day, and the company adheres to service intervals for oil change and hydraulic fluid flushes. Also important, Commercial Irrigation & Turf relies on its nearby commercial dealer to service heavier, complex equipment.

At the end of the day, the right equipment, trained crewmembers and attention to maintenance are the key ingredients to completing irrigation jobs efficiently and up to quality standards. And finding the right combination of tools for the job to avoid too much cleanup. As Hunsicker says, "We are irrigation installers – we want to put pipe in the ground, sprinkler heads and put water to it." **L&L**





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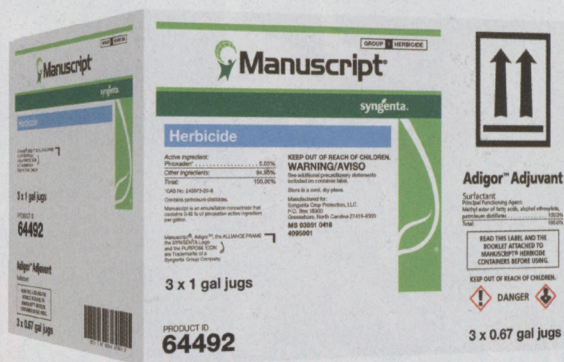


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**For more info:** [sipcamagrousa.com](http://sipcamagrousa.com)



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



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- Revolver works faster in warmer temperatures – and offers control of *Poa annua* in warm-season turf as well as Goosegrass control and dallisgrass suppression.

**For more info:** [es.bayer.us/herbicides-solutions](http://es.bayer.us/herbicides-solutions)

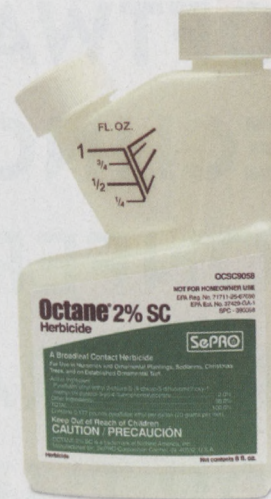


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**For more info:** [prime-sourcellc.com](http://prime-sourcellc.com)



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**The pitch:** Octane Herbicide is a simple, economical solution to faster broadleaf weed control.

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



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## SOLD OUT

By  
**Kelli  
Rodda**

The industry faces plant shortages from last year's soaring pandemic sales and this year's southern freeze. That could spell better margins for growers as demand has never been higher.





# THAT'S WHAT'S ROUGH THIS PIVOT.



**As the calendar turned to 2021**, the green industry was busy making plans and predictions. During last year's pandemic gardening frenzy, many growers dipped into their stock earmarked for 2021. As pundits were forecasting another strong sales year for plant material, the supply chain was pondering how to reconcile industry-wide plant shortages.

Then Winter Storm Uri dumped record snow and damaging ice from coast to coast February 12-16. The storm was followed by the coldest temperatures in decades in the south-central states. Temperatures across Texas didn't climb above freezing for several days. Most of the state experienced negative temperatures for the first time in 60 years, with areas like Dallas-Fort Worth and Tyler dropping below zero. For some perspective, cities like Dallas have average February temperatures between a low of 41°F and a high of 61°F. →



Extended freezing temperatures killed or badly damaged shrubs, trees and perennials in nurseries, garden centers, greenhouses and landscapes throughout the state, in turn exacerbating the existing plant shortages.

"The green industry will experience increased labor, fertilizer and other costs as part of the price of replacing the plant material that was lost during the winter storm," says Marco Palma, horticultural marketing expert in the Department of Agricultural Economics.

Palma said AgriLife Extension and the Texas Nursery and Landscape Association (TNLA) are awaiting responses from their statewide-loss assessment survey before venturing an estimate of green industry losses.

"It will take some weeks before we get a full picture of the immediate losses, but they will easily be in the tens of millions and probably in the hundreds of millions of dollars," he says.

Amy Graham, president and CEO of TNLA, says much of the severe damage occurred in the larger metropolitan areas such as Houston, Dallas, San Antonio and Austin. While the green industry will be able to recover and provide replacements for some of these plants, there likely will be a shortage of landscaping trees for some years to come, she says.

"Another consideration is that growers won't be able to determine the extent of the damage, including root damage, to a large number of their plants until we get warmer weather."

Adrian Muehlstein, chief operating officer at Southwest Wholesale Nursery in Carrollton, Texas, says he's confident that their operation can serve its 2021 wholesale landscape plant customers. It's when you start projecting out past the current year that keeps the operations manager up at night.

"This is going to have a long-lasting impact on Texas horticulture. I don't think we're going to be able to get out of this as far as recovering from an inventory standpoint across the board," he says. "Going into the season we already were facing COVID shortages on many plant materials, now you compound that with the freeze



Nursery owners in Texas had to act fast when single-digit temperatures threatened crops and trees that were already in high demand.

that we had here as well as in Louisiana, I just don't see this plant shortage fixing itself anytime soon. It's looking like a three- to five-year process right now."

Southwest Wholesale was able to react before the storm hit and saved much of their inventory.

"Luckily, we saw this thing coming in advance," he says. "At the time we were in the stretch of some nice mild weather, so we were taking steps to increase our inventories and we certainly have those capabilities as far as having enough greenhouse structures is concerned."

Muehlstein had a clear directive for the nurseries' staff: pack every single inch of those greenhouses with plant material.

"I told them, 'I don't want anyone to be able to walk a single foot in those greenhouses,'" he says. "I wanted those green-

houses crammed full of plants, and in the end, we were able to save a ton of material."

His crew moved all of the operation's 3-, 5- and 7-gallon materials inside the greenhouses, and even the nursery's large 30-gallon specialty materials were accommodated inside.

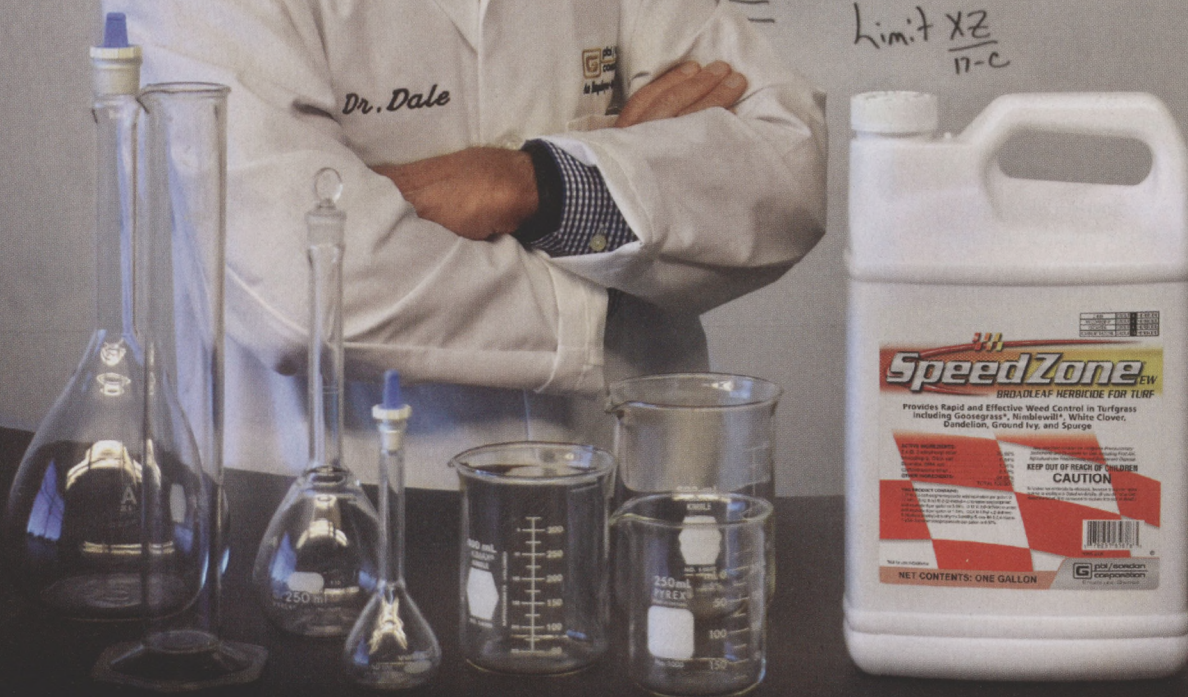
Muehlstein has heard from neighboring growers that can't source the plant containers they need to put in a crop this season, which could hamper the recovery process for many growers. Panic buying of any and everything plant-related among horticultural operations is already taking place, he says.

"This is an opportunity to educate our customers about a different plant or a different variety that they might take a look at, if we do end up running into some walls on certain species of plants this spring," he says.



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# LOUISIANA IS 'OPEN FOR BUSINESS'

**LOUISIANA WAS HIT HARD** by the winter storm as well. But for the most part, the state's nursery industry weathered the storm. Cari Jane Murray, executive secretary of the Louisiana Nursery and Landscape Association, says product loss is about 20% for the whole state.

"There was significant structural damage," Murray says. "But we were very fortunate in some areas for plant damage."

Of that 20%, Murray says the losses were mostly small liners. Murray says the central part of the state bore the brunt of the storm. That includes Forest Hill and the surrounding areas, the state's horticultural heart and home to about 200 nurseries. This area was ravaged by two hurricanes and the pandemic last year, and the February winter storms added yet another challenge.

The LNLA has been putting out the word that Louisiana nurseries are open for business, with plenty of plants available to purchase – at least for now. Growers are working to address high demand, and while Murray expects shortages in the future, she thinks 2021 will be a good year for the green industry in Louisiana.

"There has been a lot of talk about purchasing plants," she says. "People are scared that plants may not be available or they all got damaged or destroyed. That is not the case. There are many, many plants to be bought in the Forest Hill area and they are up and at them, shipping. You can't keep us down."

"Just be creative, that's what's going to get us through this pivot. To me, that's the beauty of our industry. There are just so many plants and varieties that are out there that are untapped, that people should be trying out."

Growers in Texas and Louisiana are adapting to what the storm left in its wake, says Brett Jones, senior director of Category Management-Nursery at SiteOne, a national landscape supply company.

"For some growers, it means a complete change to their schedules, product offerings and/or availabilities, while for others it means moving ready dates, shearing and cleaning crops ahead of the next flush, and sourcing replacement material," Jones says. "One common theme throughout is the 'we need to wait and see' mentality. There is



Growers across Texas experienced lows in the single digits and below zero for a week, causing damage to countless crops.

one thing that is true for all; not one grower in Louisiana or Texas was unaffected. The only difference is the level of impact on the different operations. The best growers are finding supplements for their now depleted inventory and offering substitutes for the products they currently do not have."

In the wake of the freeze, items such as loropetalum, hawthorns, wax leaf ligustrum, palms, tropicals, citrus, pittosporum, gardenias, oleanders, live oaks, crape myrtles, agave and aloes are some of the main plants that took the biggest hit.

**PRICING QUESTIONS.** With the market experiencing elasticity of demand, growers should be raising prices, says Charlie Hall, ag economist and Ellison Chair in International Floriculture at Texas A&M University.

His advice: Raise prices and don't apologize for it. Besides the supply and demand side of the equation, the cost of doing business is rapidly increasing. He predicts a 5.24% increase in the cost of inputs this year.

"I expect to see a similar boom this spring and the buying frenzy will likely extend into

the summer, but the industry can't count on the same increases as last year," Hall says. "The industry is planning for increases, but there are still a lot of unknowns."

Jonathan Saperstein, CEO of Everde Growers based in Houston, has witnessed plant price increases in some markets.

"I expect to see plant prices go up unevenly and sporadically throughout the year and going into next year," Saperstein says. "I say sporadically because it's not the typical 'I'm going to raise my prices to start the year' plan, it's because growers are seeing the losses and movement of inventory and nurseries are making adjustments."

Covering plant losses, the increasing cost of inputs and surges in shipping prices are all reasons to increase plant prices, Saperstein adds.

"If a nursery lost 5% of its crop for the year, why not go up on pricing and make up for that? Couple that with the prices of raw material going up of late in the 5% to north of 10% range and it's the right scenario to raise prices," he says. "And if you're pulling inventory forward, you still have to spend



the money to replace that.”

Ben Van Wingerden, founder of Color Orchids in Nocona, Texas, also expects to see price increases.

“There was already a large disparity between supply and demand right now in our industry, so any additional shortage will just widen that gap, and it should drive prices up,” he says. “If I had to make a prediction, I would say the retail stores will continue this trend of increased sales of everything plant-related, and these stores will be searching high and low for product to put on their shelves. Growers and the stores themselves will need to adjust their prices accordingly.”

**CURRENT AND FUTURE IMPACT.** The availability of ornamental trees and nursery plants for landscape and retail markets in Texas and the Southeast United States will continue to be in short supply in 2021 and for the foreseeable future, says Timothee Sallin, co-CEO of Cherrylake Co. in Florida.

“There will likely be an acute shortage in the spring of 2021 due to the sudden and unexpected reduction in supply and a likely increase in demand resulting from the Texas freeze. While the freeze is anticipated to have a significant impact on availability in the months ahead, the industry was already in a shortage situation prior to this event,” he adds.

The impact of the freeze will affect the supply and demand equation, he says.

“On one side, a spike in demand for landscape material is expected as property owners seek to replace a substantial amount of cold sensitive trees, palms, shrubs and tropical materials which froze in the landscape,” he says. “Nurseries and tree farms in Texas have likely lost a significant amount of inventory to the freeze, and they will need to rehabilitate cold damaged material prior to shipment, resulting in a lower supply of plant material available.

Despite not knowing how much the pandemic gardening trend will continue to climb this year, it is clear that in the short- and medium-term, the additional spike in demand coming from this phenomenon will have an immediate and significant

impact on the market for ornamental trees and plants.

“Our assessment is that we are in the middle of a decade-long cycle of under-supply,” he says. “We expect very strong demand this spring, resulting from the combination of strong housing markets, robust garden center and retail sales, and an extraordinary demand resulting from the freeze. Purchasers should expect price increases ranging from 5-25% and significant shortages of material.”

Sallin released a detailed market update you can read here: [bit.ly/1lcherrylake](https://bit.ly/1lcherrylake).

There are three significant occurrences from Winter Storm Uri that must be evaluated, Jones says.

“One, the local grower base went into a stall. They had to evaluate and see what damage occurred. Crops can be damaged, but not show anything for weeks. You can’t rush to ship questionable material. Two, in many cases the wholesale yards were less equipped or capable of weathering the effects of the storm than the growers were. This was due to the lack of facilities, bringing in product from places like California where the material was already flushing, and the types of material that customers have been buying the last 5-10 years.

“Some of this material’s hardiness wasn’t the best for this kind of weather event. All of this culminated in major losses for the wholesale yards. And three, the end consumer’s yard took a beating. The losses are significant and create an urgent need for material to be replaced immediately,” Jones explains.

These factors create a significant shift in buying strategies.

“With the local growers not sure of how much they’re affected, there is an immediate need to find material outside the impacted regions. In many cases, that means finding alternative products. The focus has shifted to areas like Florida, Alabama and California to find similar products that are immediately available to satisfy the customers’ demands. This, combined with last year’s robust selling season, has further taxed the already low spring inventory. The

buyers that continue to support and bring in material from local suppliers when available, while also maintaining bookings and relationships with the local growers, will be the ones to succeed overall.”

David Kirby, executive vice president at Everde Growers, expects plant shortages to persist and demand to be higher than inventory for three to five years.

There’s a shortage of 5-gallon trees in the Texas market, as well as a shortage of the traditional 2- and 3-inch liners, Kirby says.

In Texas, Kirby is seeing buyers look far outside their typical sales channels for material, such as Florida, Georgia and even the Mid-Atlantic. There may be some shipping cost sticker shock as well.

“The nursery industry is competing with other ag producers for common carriers and trailers, and now we’re competing with FEMA to get goods shipped throughout the country. Expect to see pay more surcharges during the shipping season this year,” he adds.

With the industry looking to other markets for plant material, there is a concern about creating surplus.

“People have to be smart about treating this situation correctly,” Saperstein says. “Growers need to build inventory appropriately and treat this as a one-off thing and pull back down to a more normalized planting rate in the future.”

The shortages will no doubt carry over into 2022, but the strain will certainly be felt at the end of spring going into June thanks in part to the freeze, Saperstein says.

“The industry really doesn’t know what the total impact of the freeze will be. We’re not seeing the replacements going into the Texas landscapes yet, but when we do, it will pull inventory in a way that people haven’t seen in a long time, or ever,” he adds. “There are losses felt by growers, but the actual impact on the landscape damage driving demand can’t be understated right now.” **L&L**

The author is editor of Nursery Management magazine, a sister publication to Lawn & Landscape. Matt McClellan, Nursery Management managing editor, and Matthew J. Grassi contributed to this story. Grassi is editor of Greenhouse Management magazine, a sister publication to Lawn & Landscape.



# THE MANGAVE PHENOMENON



Mangave 'Praying Hands'

Hans Hansen describes why he's so enthusiastic about this trendy breeding program. **By Kelli Rodda**

**W**ith their striking textures and interesting color combinations, Hans Hansen became smitten with Mangave some 15 years ago. The remarkable plant with the funny name (pronounced man-GAH-vay) would lead him to hybridize some of the coolest plants on the market.

Hans, the director of new plant development at Walters Gardens, leads a robust breeding program of Mangave, which is an intergeneric cross of Manfreda x Agave. Initially, his goal was to find hardier agave-like plants, he says. But as the program developed, the goal expanded to selecting colorful and attractive patio plants.

Because of their hybrid parentage, Mangave provide an array of colors and forms. The Manfreda line supplies the foliage spotting, as well as the cascading and wavy foliage. The Agave parentage delivers durability and architectural form.

Thankfully for transplanters, and anyone else working with Mangave, the plants are primarily void of the big, poky spines.

"I really enjoy the diversity of the plants, and the colors and form of the foliage. The plants are very adaptable and combine very well in container combinations, both with moisture-loving annuals, as well as plants with low water requirements," Hans says.

Walters Gardens introduced its first Mangave cultivar, 'Pineapple Express,' then began adding more varieties year after year. The Mad About Mangave Collection has grown to more than 30 plants.

The first Mangave was discovered in a tray of Manfreda seedlings and created by an unintentional cross pollination, he explains. Although Mangave is not from Hans' own crosses, the interesting hybrid piqued his interest, and he was able to devote more time to Mangave when he moved to Walters Gardens in 2009.

During the last 15 years, he's experienced some highs and lows, like any breeder.

"I've enjoyed discovering the diversity and ease of culture from the crosses, including some lovely purple, red and variegated forms that came from my breeding work. But it's disappointing when some of the most attractive variegated selections are difficult to produce in tissue culture," he says.

The trade and consumers alike have praised these groovy-looking plants. Consumers share their photos on Instagram and Facebook, complete with its own hashtag, #mangave. Hans attributes the popularity to the diversity of Mangaves. Consumers really dig the names, as well, with monikers like 'Bad Hair Day,' 'Purple People Eater' and 'Mission to Mars.'

"The segment of the population that has embraced it the most are the millennials," Hans says. "We try to come up with clever names that fit the plant. Mangaves are edgy, so their names can be a little outside of the box."

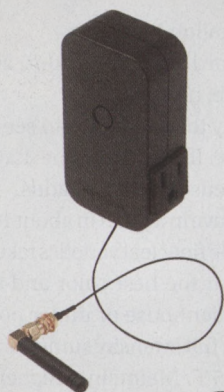
Austin Quimby, general manager at Green Lake Nursery in Dallas, Texas, is building up numbers of Mangave in production after a few years of healthy sales.

"Because Mangave are a good fit in the landscape and as an indoor plant, we've found that our landscape and our retail customers really like them," he says.



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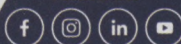
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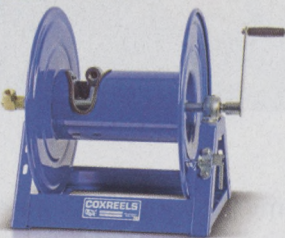
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## PLANT BREEDING



Hans Hansen, director of new plant development at Walters Gardens.

Green Lake sells a 1- and 3-gallon Mangave.

The crop was easy to onboard into production and it finishes quicker than a traditional agave, he says.

"They're tough, safe and easy to use. I'd like to see them used in mass plantings in the landscape. If we can get one that's cold hardy, that will be a big plus with our customers," he adds.

Growers can produce a Mangave in a quart in about 10-15 weeks for most selections, while some of the finer leaf varieties take a little longer.

Good UV light is required for the best color and spotting, so if they're being produced in a greenhouse or under poly, plants will color up once they're outside in full intensity sunlight. Ideal growing temperatures range from 68-75°F. Maintain a higher pH — about 6.2 to 6.8 is ideal. Mangave are not heavy feeders and require about 100 ppm of nitrogen. Don't allow them to dry out in production but avoid overly wet conditions to prevent root and crown rot.

"In liner production in our greenhouses, we treat the young plants the same way we grow our tissue culture hosta liners," Hans says. "For the quickest finish times they need the moisture that other general perennials do. For growers, time in the greenhouse equals money."

Walter Gardens, along with a select licensee network, provides wholesale liners throughout the United States and Canada. Walters Gardens also has licensed growers in Europe, Japan and Australia.

Thanks to both parents being native to alpine and desert areas, Mangave are drought tolerant in the landscape. And most Mangave can be safely overwintered in areas where temperatures drop to 20-30°F, with some doing well down to 10°F. Hans says he's still working on cold hardiness traits.

Because of their thick leaves, as well as marginal and terminal spines, Mangave are rarely bothered by browsing animals, including deer.

Mangave are well-suited for containers. Hans suggests using them in combination with other succulents or to stand alone in a mono pot. Use a succulent or bark soil mix.

Hans has no plans to slow down the Mangave breeding program.

"I think the Mangave project is one of the most rewarding and exciting breeding programs I have worked on. It has opened many opportunities, and I have developed friendships and had a lot of fun," he says. **L&L**

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# Don't phone it in

When leaving a voicemail for a potential client, make sure it's concise and creative enough to warrant a call back. **By Kim Lux**

**W**hat's keeping customers from calling you back? It could be that the sales message you're leaving on their voicemail isn't dynamic enough to pique their interest.

Learning how to draft an engaging, informative voicemail can help bring in more work.

Gary Ross, of Allies in Leadership, led a presentation on how to create a better sales message during the first-ever virtual Hard-scape North America event earlier this year.

"AT&T research found that 80% of phone calls made today go to voicemail. That's why it's extremely important to spend time and develop a voicemail message that will inspire your prospect to pick up the phone and return your call," says Ross, who has over 35 years of experience in the sales industry.

**ENGAGE FROM THE GET-GO.** Ross says just "winging it" isn't enough and improvised messages may come off sounding boastful, or worse, confusing and rambling. Instead, voicemails should sound clear, concise and compelling. They should also answer two questions – what and why?

"By 'what,' I don't mean what you do, or what you sell," Ross says. "What we're talking about here is 'what's the problem you solve?' And the 'why' is 'why should your prospect care?'"

When it comes to crafting a better voicemail message, Gary Ross of Allies in Leadership says there are six steps to follow that will help you get your point across better to potential clients.

Ross says the best way to accomplish this is by keeping it specific, relevant and making sure your message has a great level of curiosity.

He suggests introducing yourself right away, and he even says it's OK to admit if you've never met the person you're calling. Then, mention something specific – like "I recently visited your website" – that gives the person an idea about why you are calling. Finally, it's time to reel them in.

Ross uses an example of a voicemail he received recently that said, "I have two ideas we've used with other sales trainers to grow their opt-ins by over 20%." He admits it made him curious and was a great way to get him to return that call.

"You want to know what those two ideas are, who are these other sales trainers and how did he increase their opt-ins by over 20%," Ross says. "This message hit on all

three of those points that made me want to call him back."

**SET UP YOUR SCRIPT.** In addition to pointing out what makes a great message, Ross says there is a step-by-step approach to scripting a better message.

"I know a lot of salespeople who think they don't like scripted messages. Well, you probably don't like scripted messages because you didn't practice enough to make it sound like it wasn't scripted," he says.

Ross has a six-step formula to help people script a better message. He says by answering these questions below, you should be able to engage your audience and guarantee a call back.

- **Target market.** Who are you calling and who is your ideal client?
- **Results.** What results can you bring to your target market?





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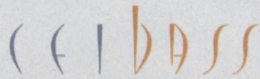




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- **What makes you and your company different?** What are the compelling differentiators? What do you and your company do that your competition isn't doing? What separates you from the pack?

"These are the key ingredients for success," Ross says.

Once you answer these questions and craft your script, it's time to make the call. And Ross recommends getting up out of your seat to do it.

"When you deliver your message, you need to be standing up and you need to speak slowly," he says. "The reason you need to be standing up is because you don't want to run the risk of sitting in a chair and starting to slouch and having your voice start to sound monotone. When you stand up, you prevent that from happening. Your tone of voice is much stronger and more confident."

Ross says there's research that shows 38% of the message you convey to people is delivered through tone rather than the words you're using.

Additionally, Ross says it is OK to mention other companies by name when leaving a voicemail. He says that he's gotten pushback for this from salespeople he's trained in the past, but he still thinks it's an important tool to utilize.

"People say they don't want to put in the people they've talked to or who they're selling," he says. "But I encourage you to put in two or three companies that you're already working with who find what you're offering very beneficial to them."

To close the message, Ross says it's vital to give your phone number at least two times.

"Say it slowly and say it twice," he says.

**MAKE THAT CONNECTION.** Ross says that when people meet for the first time – whether that's in person, over Zoom or on the phone – there are three questions that pop up in the back of their minds.

"The first question is, 'can I trust you?'" Ross says. "Trust is extremely important in order to develop a solid relationship, whether it is a business relationship or personal relationship. And how do you build trust? You just do what you say you're going to do."

Ross says the second question is, "are you committed to excellence?" And by that, he means you should be making yourself more valuable to your customers. This includes developing yourself and learning more about the industry you serve.

And, according to Ross, the final question people ask themselves is, "Do you really care about me?"

"People can tell when you genuinely care," he says. "Show people that you genuinely care. And remember, people don't care how much you know until you show them how much you care."

Ross says by being mindful of these questions, you can better connect with potential customers through the voicemail and once they return your call. **L&L**





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Continued from pg. 50

scape architects communicate and their way of doing things by getting involved with a business developer early on.

"I worked side-by-side with him, and I watched him, and I learned how he talked," he says. "I learned what they're looking for, how they speak and all that. It was valuable at the time and I didn't even realize it."

Nowadays, McCarthy says the best thing he can do to build up his relationships with architects and designers is be readily available to them.

"It's about being responsive, doing quality work and making sure you are proactively communicating," he says. "One thing for me is that I always try and answer the phone. Or if I can't, I try to call them right back or I text them. That's something that's missed in our industry. There are a lot of landscapers who say, 'Oh I'm busy. I'm not answering the phone.'"

McCarthy says he has so many partnerships that it can be overwhelming at times, but there are still a few big fish he has his eye on and is hoping to work with soon.

"In any market you have companies that are looked at as higher-end, and it's the same thing with architecture and design," he says. "We try and take care of the ones that started with us first, but there are some that have a prestige about them that we've been trying to get involved with and then they finally respond, so you don't want to turn them down."

Focusing on these relationships has truly allowed Blue Claw Associates to grow dramatically since its inception.

"We ended up doing \$2.5 million in our second year," McCarthy says. "We had gone from two mason crews just on the Cape to having a third mason crew and now having a softscape install and landscape crew. Going into 2021, we're up to three landscape install crews, five mason crews and a maintenance crew on the Cape. And then a landscape crew, maintenance crew and mason crew on the island. So, we're starting off the season with 12 crews. We're also projected in the \$5 million range." **L&L**

Continued from pg. 39

"Employees became more of a team as a result of COVID-19," he says.

Gaston adds that this was through AAA's proactive approach to providing safety protocols and information that helped team members feel secure.

"The company provided leadership and communicated weekly with employees regarding the impact COVID-19 on AAA Landscape," Gaston says. "Well over \$100,000 was spent to combat the potential impact of the virus to our workers. It was money well spent because employees were aware the company was trying to keep them as safe as possible." **L&L**



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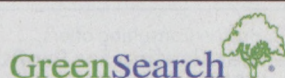
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# AN AVERAGE DAY

**Molly John**, Co-owner and  
vice president, M.J. Design Associates



Since her children are older now, Molly John doesn't have as many activities in the evening pulling her from her desk anymore.

"I suppose that's a good and bad thing, as I don't have something that forces me to leave the office," says the co-owner and vice president of M.J. Design Associates in Columbus. "I like to be around at the end of the day a couple days a week to just see crews when they come in and talk with the guys."

Interviewed by **Brian Horn**

She uses the ride home to touch base with family. "I often call my parents or one of my sisters," she says. "It is a good time to catch up with them." **Here's John's average day.**

Three days a week I work out before work. I either go to Orange Theory Fitness or our Community Rec Center for fitness classes at either 5 or 6:15 a.m. I find it is a great way to start the day and I get my workout in. I sweat too much to do mid-day, otherwise I will be showering a couple times.

If I have worked out I will grab a smoothie on my way to the office. The other days I will bring in some fruit, toast, yogurt or something from home and eat it at the office. I am fortunate to have just a 12-minute commute to the office. I love sports, so usually listening to a sports talk radio show.

I arrive by 6:30 or 7 a.m. I like to get in early before others when it is quiet and have time to organize myself for the day. I will review my to-do list from the night before, adjust as needed, check email to make sure nothing new has come in overnight. At least three days a week, I like to be out in the shop when the crews are starting up, saying hi and talking with the staff.

Like many, I am definitely more productive in the morning. I have a few weekly meetings with different staff members on Monday and Tuesday. I do my best to hit the higher priority items in the morning when I am more focused. I try to schedule client meetings for the afternoon when I find office time to be less productive.

When I am working in the field on seasonal enhancements, I will stop with my team to eat. If I am working in the office or out and about, I will just eat at my desk or when driving. If I have some personal things to get done, I just utilize that time during lunch.

By late morning to early afternoon, I like to get out of the office – reset my mind from

the morning tasks and get fresh air. I might pop out to see crew, meet with a client or just run some errands. It gives me an opportunity to see what is going on in the field. Then when I return to the office, I will get back to some of the simpler tasks that I need to complete to end the day.

I average one to two meetings three days a week. We have a full company meeting every Monday morning to get the week started. I then have a sales meeting and financial meeting Monday morning and an office meeting Tuesday. We have introduced an agenda for these meetings in order to keep us on task and hopefully shorter. We end the week on Friday with an early morning production meeting, assuring we are set for the next couple of weeks. I am not always needed at the production meeting, but I like to sit in from time to time to know how everything is going.

We have always been good about having dinner as a family, no matter what hour that turns out to be. We cook, but it is not a passion for us. So, often dinner may be take-out. The general rule is no phones at the table, and we all stick to that most times. However, I am not good at turning it off otherwise. My husband is very good at shutting it off. I will check emails and incoming messages throughout any off time.

The wind down at night usually begins about 8 p.m. We put a screen porch onto our house last year and we spent almost every night out there relaxing and watching TV. Depending on the day, I might sit down and love to fall asleep on the couch. I usually head to bed between 10 and 10:30 p.m.

During the season I will often work Saturday mornings. I find it to be very relaxing and quiet in the office. Saturdays are a great day to just catch up, reorganize and get myself ready for the next week. It allows me to enjoy the rest of the weekend. **L&L**





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