

AUGUST 2022

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FULLY-CHARGED

Interest in battery-powered equipment continues to grow in the industry.
PG. 39

MORE THE MERRIER

Adding holiday lighting services is a profitable way to keep employees busy year-round.
PG. 62

PASS *the* TORCH

As a landscape-heavy company, **Wasson Nursery** transitioned to the second generation by embracing change with sights on steady growth. **PG. 26**

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Lawn & Landscape

A GIE Media publication
Volume 43, Number 8



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Cover photo: Esther Boston

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STUDENT SPOTLIGHT

In our upcoming podcast series, we're looking to highlight some of the industry's best college horticulture students. Each month, we're interviewing these students to see where they think the green industry is headed. Plus, we'll get to know them as people. While CEOs and other top-level executives aim to recruit the next generation of workers, our podcast will give us insight into how those future employees currently feel about the green industry. If you or someone you know would be a good fit, **email Associate Editor, Jimmy Miller, at jmiller@gie.net.**

Seeking out social media superstars

Have a video or post that's gone viral? How does your company engage with its audience on social media and utilize it to promote your brand? We're looking for companies that are incredibly active on TikTok, Instagram, Twitter, Facebook and even YouTube for an upcoming project! Make sure to tag us on social media when posting. Or head to **bit.ly/LLcompanyquestionnaire** and fill out a short questionnaire and include your social media handles!

Not a normal day on the job

Lawn & Landscape Radio Network's latest podcast tells the humbling story of how Marcus May saved a family from a burning home while out on a jobsite. Everyone, including the family dog, was safe and May was back to work within two hours.



Hear from May and the colleagues that know him best. You won't want to miss this one! Visit **bit.ly/humbleheroics** and listen now!



Watch and learn

Marketing matters. It's what can move the needle for a company looking to take its business to the next level. A recent webinar of ours covers the topic in great length. Becca Presley, director of marketing and communications with Senske Services, and Joseph Barnes, marketing director with Yellowstone Landscape, discuss creative ways to recruit and retain employees, engage current clients and seek out new ones. Spend an hour listening to their advice at **bit.ly/LLmarketingmatters**.

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Brian Horn

Editor, Lawn & Landscape

"I write a lot about change because the industry is in a transitional state, especially when it comes to technology."

A charge for change

My oldest son has recently started mowing our lawn. He and his friends tossed around the idea of starting a "lawn business" but the pool, video games and hanging out pushed that to the side this year.

When I saw him mowing, though, it made me realize he'll never have a distinct childhood memory that I have. Trying to pour gas into the mower, then spilling it all over my shoes while I looked around to see if anyone – mostly my dad – saw how badly I missed.

I made the jump to a battery-powered mower a few years ago for a number of reasons, but dealing with gas and wondering if I put stabilizer in it over the winter was a major one.

According to our latest State of the Battery-Powered Equipment Market survey, this industry is also making more of a shift to batteries. In last year's survey, 42% of the people who responded said they don't use any battery-powered or electric equipment, while that number dropped to 30% this year.

We spoke with landscapers who use the equipment, and we found you'll have

those who are all-in on it, while others are coming along slowly, mainly because of local ordinances banning gas equipment.

Even those being forced to use it were open to the change, but would be more interested if the technology met their needs better.

I think those advancements are coming, but I like the fact that even though it wasn't their top choice to use, they are at least open to the idea.

I wrote about being open to change last month when I wrote about irrigation. I write a lot about change because the industry is in a transitional state, especially when it comes to technology.

Fittingly, our cover story this month is all about change. When two sons took over their father's business, Wasson Nursery, the father didn't like a lot of the changes they made. But his quote at the end of the story makes me think this transition will go just fine.

"Changes have to happen for your business to grow," he says. "The sooner you can accept that, as hard as it is, the easier it is to move on and the happier everyone will be." — *Brian Horn*

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A man in a brown shirt and tan pants is driving a yellow riding lawn mower on a lush green lawn. He has his arms raised in a celebratory gesture. In the background, there is a two-story house with a porch. The garden is filled with large, green topiary dinosaurs. A yellow pickup truck with "LUKE'S" written on it is parked nearby. A small gnome is watering the lawn with a hose. In the sky, two lawnmowers with wings are flying. The text "Keep living the small business dream." is written in a white, cursive font across the top of the image.

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Ready to help

Whether it's storm cleanup or it's serving a long-time customer, Alex Carey values quality service above all else.

By Jimmy Miller

Every day's different for Alex Carey, who runs A. Carey Landscaping in New England.

Some days, he's in the office whittling down his list of over 200 clients — that's been a recent focus as Carey aims to start working on higher profile clientele. Other days, he's buying hot dogs and hamburgers for his crews, surprising them with a cookout and pool party at his place once they return from their jobsites.

Then, of course, there are days he's out in the field alongside them. Earlier this year, ECHO recognized Carey as one of the company's ECHO Heroes, capturing on camera Carey's efforts in helping his community clean up after a storm ravaged through the area. In the video, Carey stops his truck when he noticed a tree that crushed part of someone's house.

"It's New England — wind, rain — we're used to it," Carey says. "But I looked out the window and this tree's uprooted and thought, 'Oh, boy.'"

The timing on the video was purely coincidental — ECHO was already planning to come into town for the shoot anyway, Carey says. But the 21-year-old says his team spent the next week cutting through brush and trees to help several of his clients who had their properties damaged by the storm.

"It's one thing to mow lawns on a hot 95-degree weather day, but it's another entirely to haul trees across lawns when you're used to mowing," Carey says.

But he and his team didn't mind helping. Carey says this help comes from a mutual respect he's built with his clients, many of whom being people he's worked with since he started charging people for his services a decade ago. Carey first got into yard cleanup with his dad when he was three years old, but by six or seven, he was volunteering to help his neighbors pick up their yards, too.

These relationships matter to Carey — it's one of the reasons he's paring down his list of clients. Ideally, Carey says a good customer is one who loyally reaches out to him anytime they need anything done with their property. Carey keeps a contact list of others in the green industry who offer ser-

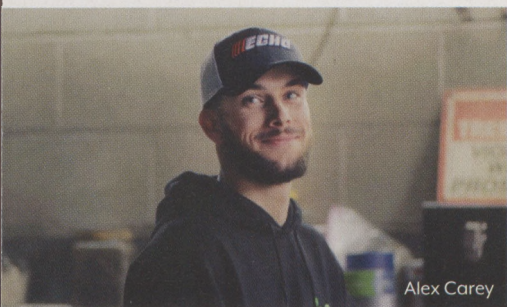


vices he can't provide, and he estimates that almost every time he's been asked about a service A. Carey can't do, he's had someone in the wings ready to help.

Of course, that goes both ways, too: Carey wants to ensure his clientele takes care of his crews. Some will bring them water or come outside with a plate of food if they're already out on the properties.

"They really care about me and my company as well. They take pride in my guys," Carey says. "For me, that's the kind of people I'd rather be doing business with."

And that mutual respect has paid dividends for Carey as a business owner, too. He says much of his advertising is word-of-mouth, as clients tell each other all about what Carey's done for their properties. Plus, one of Carey's first customers ever offered up his property as a new shop for A. Carey once the client's construction business folded during COVID-19.



Alex Carey



"I like making it a quality relationship with my customers," Carey says. "Giving them top quality service and the highest level of respect is really the line that we draw."

"Starting at a young age was really the best thing I could've done," he adds. "The customer is definitely willing to spend a few more dollars when they know there's a familiar face coming in."

At 21 years old, there's still plenty of time for those relationships to blossom. Carey envisions a future where he can look at a customer and say things like, "I've serviced your four-acre property for 15 years." These long-term ties, Carey says, would prove that they've valued their business-client relationship.

For now, he wants to maintain a steady growth with his clients. Carey says he's noticed some companies race to lock in as many properties as they can, but they don't actually do the work to make the yards look as polished as possible. That's not his style — he'd much prefer to stay with the same customers who will remain as loyal to him as he is to them.

"It's not about quality over quantity. I'm not a guy who wants to get 200, 300 lawns cut. There's no sense in doing that," Carey says. "As my company grows, it grows. I don't want to put the cart ahead of the horse."

Alex Carey
of A. Carey
Landscaping
was named
one of ECHO's
Heroes.

SingleOps earns \$74 million growth equity investment

The investment is to drive expansion of SingleOps' business management software and integrated payments platform.

SINGLEOPS has announced a \$74 million growth equity investment from FTV Capital, a sector-focused growth equity investor with more than two decades of experience in vertical software and payments. The funding will enable SingleOps to expand its platform and grow its team to further provide support and services to its customers.

"Since day one, our mission at SingleOps has been to build and implement software solutions purpose built for green industry businesses that ultimately help them win customers for life," said Sean McCormick, CEO at SingleOps. "We've seen tremendous growth the last few years and have truly begun to make a lasting positive impact in the green industry, which has only been possible through the hard work of our amazing team and the strong response from our customers."

With 423% revenue growth over the past three years, SingleOps is one of the top 10 fastest-growing software companies in Atlanta, according to the Inc. 5000 Fastest-Growing Private Companies in America list for 2021. The company's growth is fueled by green industry businesses offering landscaping, tree care, lawn care and landscape supply services seeking to improve productivity by automating key processes.

"FTV is excited to partner with SingleOps' passionate leadership team, who consistently listen to the needs of their customers and have become an industry leader as a result," said Robert Anderson, partner at FTV Capital.

Anderson and Gurmaan Bhatia, vice president at FTV Capital, will join SingleOps' board of directors as part of the investment. Existing investor Five Elms Capital also fully participated in the round. Houlihan Lokey acted as a financial advisor to SingleOps, and Fisher Broyles served as SingleOps' legal counsel.

Massey Services acquires Peninsular Pest Control

Peninsular Pest Control is headquartered in Jacksonville, Florida.

MASSEY SERVICES, a company in the pest management industry, has acquired Peninsular Pest Control Service.

Peninsular Pest Control, also known as the "Critter Gitter," is headquartered in Jacksonville, Florida. The company provides residential and commercial pest control, termite and landscape services to 30,000 customers throughout Northeast Florida, including Jacksonville, St. Augustine and Ponte Vedra.

"We are pleased to welcome the Peninsular team members and customers to the Massey Services organization," said Tony Massey, president & CEO of Massey Services. "Peninsular Pest Control is a second generation, family-owned organization that has been providing superior service to customers for nearly 70 years. We look forward to carrying on their legacy of total customer satisfaction for years to come."

Massey Services was founded in 1985 in Orlando, Florida. The organization now has 177 locations company-wide.



Ernst & Young awards Jesson regional entrepreneur award

Matt Jesson is president and CEO of Green Lawn Fertilizing/Green Pest Solutions.

ERNST & YOUNG RECENTLY RECOGNIZED Green Lawn Fertilizing's President and CEO, Matt Jesson, as an Entrepreneur Of The Year 2022 Greater Philadelphia Award Winner.

Jesson was selected by a panel of independent judges according to the following criteria — entrepreneurial spirit, purpose, growth and impact — among other core contributions and attributes.

"I'm very blessed to work with such an incredibly passionate team that truly cares about our team members and customers," Jesson said.

Jesson has been an entrepreneur since the age of 12, when he started his own neighborhood lawn cutting business in Havertown, Pennsylvania. He ran that business all the way through his early twenties until he transitioned the business from Jesson Landscaping into lawn care with the founding of Green Lawn Fertilizing in 2004. Jesson started another business in 2012 with the establishment of a dedicated pest control brand, Green Pest Solutions.

Green Lawn Fertilizing/Green Pest Solutions has grown to over 50,000 residential customers, over 250 team members and over \$30 million in annual revenue.

The regional winners will now be considered by the national independent judging panel, and national awards will be presented in November at the Strategic Growth Forum. The Entrepreneur of The Year National Overall Award winner will then move on to compete for the EY World Entrepreneur Of The Year Award in June 2023.

Jesson was also a 2017 Lawn & Landscape Leadership award winner. Green Lawn ranked No. 90 on Lawn & Landscape's Top 100 list.

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Fairway Lawns receives new investment funding

Morgan Stanley Capital Partners will invest in the residential lawn care provider in Arkansas.

INVESTMENT FUNDS MANAGED by Morgan Stanley Capital Partners, the middle-market focused private equity team at Morgan Stanley Investment Management, have completed an investment in Fairway Lawns.

MSCP is partnering with the current management team led by CEO Kyle DeMilt, who will continue to lead the business.

Headquartered in Little Rock, Arkansas, Fairway is a residential lawn care company. The company, which operates 16 branches across the Southeast region, primarily provides recurring lawn care services such as weed control and fertilization, in addition to complementary services including pest control and tree/shrub maintenance.

"For nearly 40 years, Fairway has consistently delivered best in class residential lawn care services to our customers, and we are thrilled to partner with MSCP on the next phase in our history," said Kyle DeMilt, CEO of Fairway. "We look to leverage MSCP's approach to operational excellence, as well as their experience completing complementary acquisitions to accelerate the expansion of Fairway's capabilities and geographic footprint in the coming years."

"We are excited to partner with Kyle and the Fairway team as they continue to work to build the company into the leading residential lawncare platform in the Southeast," said Adam Shaw, managing director and head of business services at MSCP. "For MSCP, Fairway represents an opportunity to execute on our core strategy of investing in focus sub-sectors where we have deep institutional knowledge and experience to drive value creation. We look forward to working together to advance the company's market leadership position through organic growth and acquisitions."

Debevoise & Plimpton served as legal counsel to MSCP, and Solomon Partners served as MSCP's financial advisor. Carlyle Global Credit acted as sole administrative agent, bookrunner and arranger on the financing. Harris Williams served as financial advisor to Fairway.



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Ronin creates outdoor power equipment, utility trailers platform

Through three simultaneous acquisitions, the merged group will offer a wide selection of woodchippers, snowplows, winches and utility trailers.

RONIN EQUITY PARTNERS announced the creation, through three simultaneous acquisitions, of a diversified manufacturer of small- to medium-scale outdoor power equipment and utility trailers. The three merging firms focus on homeowners with more than five acres of land and on small-scale landscapers, ranchers and farmers. Two of the businesses, DK2 and

SnowBear, are based in Ontario, Canada, and the third business, Currahee Trailers, is headquartered in Mount Airy, Georgia. The combined company will have over 50 years of operating experience.

Operating under the DK2 corporate name, the merged group will offer a wide selection of woodchippers, snowplows, winches and utility trailers. The owners

and senior management teams of all three companies have retained a significant stake in the merged group and remain actively involved in company management.

"These three firms are helping to create a new category of high-end consumers and small-scale professional users for outdoor power equipment and utility trailers. We see significant growth in this prosumer demand for years to come," said David Feierstein, managing partner of Ronin.

"We'll combine the best of the companies' manufacturing and delivery models, extend those capabilities to complementary equipment categories, and finance organic expansion and acquisition," said Ronin Partner Tiffany Bell, who joins DK2 as CFO.

Although the purchase price is undisclosed, on a merged basis the group registers annual revenues in excess of \$60 million and shows average annual sales

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growth over the past five years of 40-plus percent. Ronin has reserved more than \$25 million to fund highly synergistic acquisitions for DK2 and is currently in discussions with several targets. More than 35 complementary businesses have been identified.

"This is more than just an investment," said Steve Malizia, founder and CEO of DK2. "Ronin is bringing us back-office resources and scaling experience, while reinforcing operating muscle so that we can exceed our base potential as a combined group."

At the merged DK2, Malizia will serve as CEO, alongside new Chairman Doug Robinson, one of more than 30 Ronin Operating Advisors — a group that helps source transactions and advises on tactics and strategy. Over a 30-year career, Robinson served as CEO of multiple home improvement, appliance, and building materials companies. A former president of international

operations and development for Lowe's Companies, Robinson headed the group's e-commerce initiative.

Joining Malizia and Robinson on the new DK2 board are four other Ronin Operating Advisors: Jim Core, formerly president of the Professional Division at Home Depot; Tory Upham, previously general manager at Dakine, an outdoor equipment company; Gabriel Arreaga, chief supply chain officer at Kroger; and Mark Traylor, formerly president of the AMES Companies, a non-powered lawn and garden tools company.

The acquisition of the three companies

was financed using Ronin's balance sheet, with investments from a range of limited partners, including Stephens Capital Partners, Northwood Ventures and Knott Partners.

Ronin and its investors have deployed, or reserved for follow-on portfolio investment, in excess of \$350 million. The capital was committed to four platform investments, comprising a total of 14 companies. Apart from DK2, Ronin's three other buy-and-build platforms cover commercial refrigeration, the specialty cheese industry and wastewater purification and filtration. **L&L**

"This is more than just an investment."

Ronin is bringing us back-office resources and scaling experience, while reinforcing operating muscle so that we can exceed our base potential as a combined group."

—STEVE MALIZIA, FOUNDER AND CEO OF DK2



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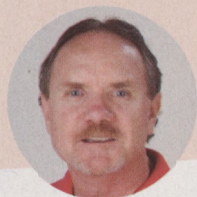
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THE MID-YEAR REVIEW: PART 2

→ **THE BUSINESS FINANCIAL** cycle is very important for entrepreneurs to understand. It's like grabbing the fire hose faucet handle that gives you control over the flow of water. You gain the ability to turn it on, turn it off, increase or decrease it. Unfortunately, too many entrepreneurs find themselves all wet and at the wrong end of the hose.

This cycle is comprised primarily of budget preparation at the beginning of the fiscal year (usually the calendar year) and the mid-year review (MYR) in the middle of the fiscal year. Mastering the business financial cycle not only provides an entrepreneur and his or her team with the benchmarks, KPIs and needed information to run the business. It also provides them with confidence and peace of mind knowing that they are in control of their destiny.

How it works in the field

My last article discussed some of the major items that an entrepreneur and his or her team should analyze during the MYR. Here are a few more:

1. BACKLOG: Are you on track to achieve or exceed the budgeted revenue amounts for all of your divisions? If not, what's your team's plan to get back on track? Knowing your backlog is critical for you and your managers. I like to monitor it and every legitimate lead that I receive on an MS Excel worksheet called the Bid Board. It tells me the status of all leads, my won/loss ratio and what's in the pipeline.

2. BREAK-EVEN POINT (BEP): Your BEP goes hand-in-hand with your backlog for each division. For instance, if your sales are too low, once you reach your BEP, you could lower your gross profit margin on bids to make them more competitive (see last month's article for how to calculate your BEP).

3. BENCHMARKS AND KPIS: Here are some key performance indicators (KPIs) to review.

A. CREW/TECHNICIAN DAILY REVENUE GOALS: Review how much revenue each crew and/or technician is producing per nine crew-hour day. Here are some examples. Yours will probably vary from mine.

i. 3-Person install crew: Such a crew usually bills roughly \$600 per person per man-day (\$1,800 per crew-day) for labor. Costs for materials and specialty equipment are on top of this.

ii. 2-Person maintenance crew: The daily revenue goal for this crew can vary dramatically depending on geographical location, commercial or residential, etc. This crew would usually bill about \$800 per day.

iii. Irrigation technician: Excluding materials, an irrigation technician usually bills between \$700 to \$800 per day or approximately \$85 per man-hour (\$85 x 9 Mhrs = \$765 per day).

iv. Lawn care technician: With materials, a lawn care (fertiliza-

tion, weed control, mosquito / tick control, etc.) technician should produce a minimum of \$1,000 per day and preferably \$1,200 to \$1,500 per day.

v. 2-Person fine gardening crew: \$1,000 per day isn't uncommon for such a crew. \$55 per man-hour (+/-), billed on a times and materials (T&M) basis is in the ballpark.

vi. Misc.: My clients and I set up daily revenue goals for each type of work. This makes such work objectively measurable (timeable and quantifiable). It's the manager's job to see that these daily revenue goals are achieved.

B. GROSS PROFIT MARGINS (GPMS): Division GPMS, as well as revenue goals, provide a report card of sorts for division managers. You should measure GPMS both in dollars and percentages. My GPM benchmarks have truck and equipment costs (usually 10-12% of sales) above the line or in direct costs. The below figures reflect GPMS in a normal economy:

- i. Landscape installation, residential:
35% to 40%
- ii. Landscape installation, commercial:
25% +/- 5%
 1. Mid to high twenties for negotiated work.
 2. Mid to low twenties for low-bid-take-all work.
- iii. Landscape maintenance, all:
35% to 40%
- iv. Irrigation service work (with materials):
50% +/- 5%
- v. Lawn care work:
55% +/- 5%
- vi. Fine gardening work:
45% +/- 5%
- vii. General tree work:
45% +/- 5%

This is a learned process. It takes time to master it, but the rewards in profitability, confidence and peace of mind can be well worth it. For part 1 of this article, visit, bit.ly/myrpt1. L&L

THE MID-YEAR REVIEW

is an ideal time to review all kinds of benchmarks — including gross profit margins and break-even points.

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

WHEN IT'S A BUMPY RIDE

→ **ON A RECENT**, bumpy flight back to Denver, I thought of the aviation maxim: "Don't overcorrect in turbulence." Change and uncertainty — like flying through cross winds and rough weather — are unsettling. Sometimes, change tempts us to push as hard as we can in the opposite direction. But as every experienced pilot knows, overcorrecting can cause a loss of control.

A turbulent market is a new challenge for today's business owners. They're rightfully concerned about the trajectory of the economy, though many are unprepared for the impact interest rate hikes and inflation will have on their organizations, customers and employees. Overcorrection may exacerbate the impacts of a challenging economy but small corrections, with an eye on the horizon, can help you ride it out.

Here are five steps you can take to stay on course:

1. EVALUATE YOUR DEBT-TO-EQUITY RATIO. Your balance sheet ratio — total liabilities divided by total owner's equity — is one that bankers look at to determine loan worthiness. Companies that are over-leveraged may be able to make current loan payments in a good economy but could struggle to continue doing so if regular monthly cashflow declines. Companies with a high debt-to-equity ratio may consider refinancing debt into a lower monthly payment or leasing vehicles and equipment rather than buying and reinvesting profits into the company. Companies whose ratio is over 2 may have trouble securing a bank loan or line of credit.

2. CASH IS KING. The saying, "the person with the gold makes the rules" holds true for cash. Companies with excess cash have added leverage and more options — like buying outright rather than financing or putting that cash to work for the business, while remaining liquid enough to weather a rainy day — or year. Also, a strong cash position allows you to borrow at a lower rate than the market returns available by investing excess cash. The quick ratio — cash, receivables and marketable securities divided by current liabilities — should be between 1 and 2. More than that may be too much cash on hand that could be put to better use. Less than 1 and the company is probably struggling to pay its bills. Bankers and other interested parties will check this ratio to quickly evaluate a company's financial health.


3. PRUNE YOUR CLIENT LIST. Understanding your client's total economic value is critical. What is the income and cost across all selling divisions? Is the account a good fit? The economic cost of an account is the difference between what a company makes servicing a current

client versus what they could make by servicing a different, more profitable one. Pruning the less profitable allows growth and a more efficient use of assets.

4. NIX THE OVERTIME. Overtime is a necessary evil, especially now that it is so difficult to hire and retain staff. Avoid becoming ambivalent to it, though. Put basic requirements in place that control and curb overtime. Verify scope creep or work habits are not requiring more job time than necessary. Require management approval prior to overtime being worked, and verify that routing and scheduling are accurate and as tight as possible. Labor is a company's biggest expense. Controlling it pays huge dividends when managed correctly.

5. MAXIMIZE INTERNAL EFFICIENCIES. It is easy to forget that charging higher prices is not the only thing that can help offset the margin erosion that accompanies higher direct costs. Looking internally and finding improvement opportunities — less overhead, better processes, less waste — can often add margin back to the bottom line as well. Ask employees which tasks are the biggest time wasters and eliminate them or improve processes. Maybe it won't be necessary to add that new person after all.

When these five financial best practices are an operating norm, you will be better positioned to weather economic storms and cruise to greater profitability during times of economic growth. **L&L**



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CREAM OF THE CROP

WITH BILL ARMAN

IS A LANDSCAPE BUSINESS CONSULTANT. HE SPENT NEARLY 30 YEARS AT ONE OF THE INDUSTRY'S BIGGEST COMPANIES.

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

ADAPT, CHANGE AND INNOVATE

→ **THERE HAS NEVER BEEN** a better time for your organization to make some changes in how you run your business. Often when we are faced with many business challenges like we're experiencing today, we not only should change; we must adapt, change and innovate or be left behind. Or, even worse, left out altogether — as in gone.

Here are some of the key areas businesses should focus on, pay attention to and implement newer and better methods to resolve and actually take advantage of these challenges.

WORKFORCE SHORTAGE. There is plenty of work to be done, but finding and keeping good team members has become the biggest challenge we have faced in the history of our industry.

RISING COSTS. The cost and availability of the workforce, fuel, materials, equipment and vehicles has been turbulent. This puts increased pressure on organizations to be more efficient with their estimating, pricing and renewal processes.

GOVERNMENT REGULATIONS. More and more fertilizers and pesticides are being limited or forbidden for use. H-2B allocations are becoming less reliable. Gas-operated equipment and vehicles are being mandated by cities (now) and even some states (soon) for conversion to electric powered equipment.

8 Ways to Conquer your Challenges!

Here are few suggestions to help with dealing with these challenges that we face today.

1. Learn About Leading Change. One of the best authors and books about change is Jon Kotter with his book on Leading Change and the parable version, Our Iceberg is Melting. Both are great books to help leaders with Kotter's 8-step process to lead and implement change at your organization.

2. Engage Your Team. Good leaders engage their team to gather the collective knowledge and experience of their team members. Conduct regular meetings to get input on ways you can become more efficient, effective and safe. You will be surprised what you can learn by engaging and collaborating with your team.

3. Engage Your Customers. Conduct one-on-one sessions and focus groups with your current and potential customers. Learn more about their business challenges and ways they suggest how to deal with your challenges.

4. Seek and Take Good Counsel. This can be accomplished in several ways:

- **Trailblazers:** Many state associations and National Association of Landscape Professionals' (NALP) members have a Trailblazer Program where you can get free advice and valuable input from a seasoned professional.

- **Consultants:** There are plenty of excellent consultants that can be a good fit with your specific areas of focus and needs.

- **Mentor:** Every leader should have a mentor to bounce challenges and ideas off regularly. A mentor may not even be a landscape person, but a person who has grown a successful business. This can be found for free from sources like SCORE.

5. Join a Peer Group. It's nice to know other leaders have some similar challenges, and peer groups help come up with collective ideas and solutions. There are plenty of industry peer groups available that have had some very successful results. Remember, we are better together than we are by ourselves.

6. Attend Conferences. Learn from speaker presentations, workshops and vendor expertise. There are many state organizations, and NALP conducts annual conferences. Lawn & Landscape magazine also conducts a technology conference annually.

7. Online Learning. Certainly, hands-on or learn-by-doing is perhaps the best method for learning; however, there are many online opportunities as well. Pick a topic where your need is greatest and seek out online learning opportunities.

8. Read Articles, Books/Audio Books, Internet.

Industry Magazine/Online: Certainly, Lawn & Landscape magazine has many articles that are most helpful.

Books: Decide on key areas of focus at your organization. Pick one or two out and mandate your team read it.

Internet/YouTube/Podcasts: etc.: It's still amazing what is available to help you in many areas.

SUMMARY. The challenges are plenty for sure. The companies that see these as opportunities and take advantage of these challenges by adapting, changing and innovating will emerge as true industry leaders. **L&L**

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Shanna Scordo

President, EarthCraft DBM

SEVERAL YEARS AGO, I noticed enrollment of women in the landscape contracting program at Penn State was declining. The thought of these young women entering our industry without a solid base of female peers was concerning.

Personally, I was blessed to graduate alongside several incredible women at PSU. After graduation, many of us were the sole female representation at our respective workplaces. We quickly realized how hard it is to talk with your male boss about bathrooms and basic feminine needs. Tackling bigger issues was even tougher. Without female leadership or coworkers, we often felt uncomfortable or even invisible at work. In these moments, I leaned on my fellow grads.

I decided to extend a helping hand to our industry's next generation of female leaders. I connected with two of my fellow grads, and with the faculty's blessing, we held roundtable mentoring chats over the next three years.

The sessions were well received, and I'm grateful to have been a part of it. I hope by sharing some details here, you might be inspired to implement a similar program in your area.

KEYS TO SUCCESS

First, serve good food! We experimented with different venues and menus, from a full lunch buffet at the Nittany Lion Inn to

pizzas delivered to a classroom after hours. The menu varied, but the fellowship was the same. In our case, the landscape department covered all the costs.

Second, drop the formalities. At this meeting, we aren't employers, and we certainly aren't recruiters; we're just a bunch of ladies chatting about work, sharing stories and making space for each other to feel seen and heard.

Third, establish ground rules. We set boundaries on what the meeting was not. It was not a forum for man-bashing or whining. Beyond that, no topic was taboo.

TOPICS FOR DISCUSSION

We touched on feminine hygiene, lack of bathroom facilities and advocating for your own basic needs. We answered questions on family planning and pregnancy, and the challenges of being a parent in an industry designed by men. We normalized their concerns and spoke truth to the many issues surrounding being a woman in this industry.

We explored the many diplomatic tightropes women walk in the workplace. All of us agreed the men in our industry are generally welcoming, but we brainstormed on how to identify and handle true harassment, discrimination or disempowerment, just in case.

We urged them to avoid self-sabotaging behaviors like competitiveness, perfectionism or aggression. We encouraged personal growth by suggesting great books and steering them toward industry groups.

We shared our stories and asked to hear theirs. We listened. We laughed. We even cried a little. At the heart of all this, is connection.

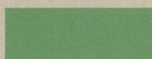
LASTING IMPACT

Currently, a couple dozen women are shouldering their way through the industry, and hopefully they're using some of the tools they learned us to carve out successful career paths. 'A couple dozen' might not seem like much, but even on this micro-level, it is impactful.

What if we all implemented a similar program at our local universities, colleges, career and technical schools, or even high schools? We could take it a step farther by inviting these young women into our networking circles after graduation and beyond.

Perhaps our small-scale, grass-roots mentoring could have a national impact and move the needle toward gender parity in the landscape industry. **L&L**

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



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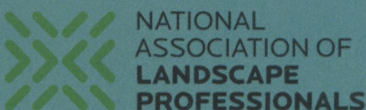
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AS A LANDSCAPE-HEAVY COMPANY, WASSON NURSERY
TRANSITIONED TO THE SECOND GENERATION BY EMBRACING
CHANGE WITH SIGHTS SET ON STEADY GROWTH.

story by **BROOKE BILYJ**
photos by **ESTHER BOSTON**

When Dan Wasson Sr. started Wasson Nursery in June 1977, he didn't realize he was building a foundation for future generations. Initially, his goal was just to earn \$25,000 in a year. He ended up selling \$40,000 of work that first year with only two employees — quickly surpassing his goal.

Dan Sr. worked long hours building the business, now based in Muncie, Indiana. His sons, Dan and Bob, later grew up working in the family business. Dan remembers his dad throwing him on a landscape crew one summer when he was about 13. The other employees held him to the same high standards as anyone else, not cutting him any slack as the owner's son.

"That would be my advice to other family businesses that are trying to figure out how to get to the next level," Dan, the son, says. "If you want the second generation to be successful, don't start them off in management. Put them out with the guys doing the hard work."

Gradually, Dan Sr. gave his sons additional responsibilities while grooming them to embody core values like hard work, honesty and family.

Over time, the small company grew into a \$12 million business with 150 employees working in three retail garden centers, 13 greenhouses, and a large lawn care and landscape division.

While lawn care and landscaping comprise two-thirds of the revenue today, the family decided to hold on to the



Earlier this year, Dan Wasson, right, took over as CEO of the company his father, Dan, left, started more than four decades ago.

“

WE BEGAN TO HIRE VERY
intentionally
BASED ON THE TYPE OF
EMPLOYEE WE WANTED TO
WORK WITH — SOMEONE
COLLABORATIVE, FUN,
FAST-PACED, A CONTINUAL
LEARNER, AND EAGER TO
BE PART OF *growth.*”

— ZACH YEAGY, CHIEF OPERATING OFFICER

original name as a nod to the company's roots and reputation.

As the Wasson sons took over each half of the business — Bob overseeing retail operations and Dan heading the service division — they realized that some of the processes their dad developed weren't scalable with the growth they saw ahead. In preparation for the official leadership transition earlier this year, Dan Sr. had to learn to let go and give Dan the reins to lead Wasson Nursery forward as the new CEO.

“I want to maintain a lot of what got us started, but we also have to be willing to



adapt," Dan says. By balancing his father's values with his vision for the future, here's how Dan Wasson grew the family's lawn care and landscape division to over \$8 million — an increase of nearly 25% over the last three years.

SHAPING THE CULTURE. First, to drive the company's continued growth through the next generation, Dan needed to get the right people on the bus. He began building out the executive team by hiring a chief operating officer, Zach Yeagy, who played a strategic role in shaping the company's culture.



A focus on hiring to fit key culture points has fostered growth for Wasson Nursery.



Dan, left, and Zach Yeagy

"We began to hire very intentionally based on the type of employee we wanted to work with — someone collaborative, fun, fast-paced, a continual learner, and eager to be part of growth," Yeagy says.

To identify these candidates, the company revamped its interview process to focus more on cultural fit than job-related skills. "We hire for culture first, because we feel confident that we can teach the skills," Yeagy says.

The key to these interviews, he says, is asking open-ended questions instead of leading candidates toward the expected answer. "That's one of the biggest pitfalls of interviewing," Yeagy says, "because everybody's good at it when you say, 'You're good at that, right?' But if you ask a broad, open-ended question, it's easy to decide if somebody truly knows how to do something."

For example, he might ask candidates to explain how they handled a situation when

something went wrong on a jobsite — or how they rewarded their team if everything went right. The goal, he says, is to understand how candidates might treat other people as part of Wasson's team.

To attract more team players, Wasson Nursery implemented an employee referral program. Employees who bring in new hires can earn \$250 after 30 days and another \$250 after 90 days of employment.

"We trust the guys and girls who work for us, and if their friends also act like them, then we're going to get a bunch of high-quality employees who already want to work with each other," Yeagy says. "We have employees who are telling their friends or family members to work here, so it's turned into a family business."

RETAINING THE STAFF. Bringing in the right people was only half the battle; the next challenge was keeping them.

Fortunately, the company's growth cre-

In addition to its lawn and landscape division, Wasson Nursery has three retail garden centers and 13 greenhouses.



ated plenty of opportunities for job growth and promotion, contributing to long-term employment. For example, one of the project managers started working in retail as a cashier, then began managing landscape inventory as a production manager before moving into his current role. "People are moving into different roles, and new roles are getting created annually," Yeagy says.

Training is another key component of employee advancement and retention. Every season starts with an annual landscape kickoff, where Dan reminds crews about standard operating procedures and other

expectations, from wearing uniforms to hitching trailers properly. The company also invests in leadership training for executives and managers, which hones their communication skills and management techniques to keep the team cohesive.

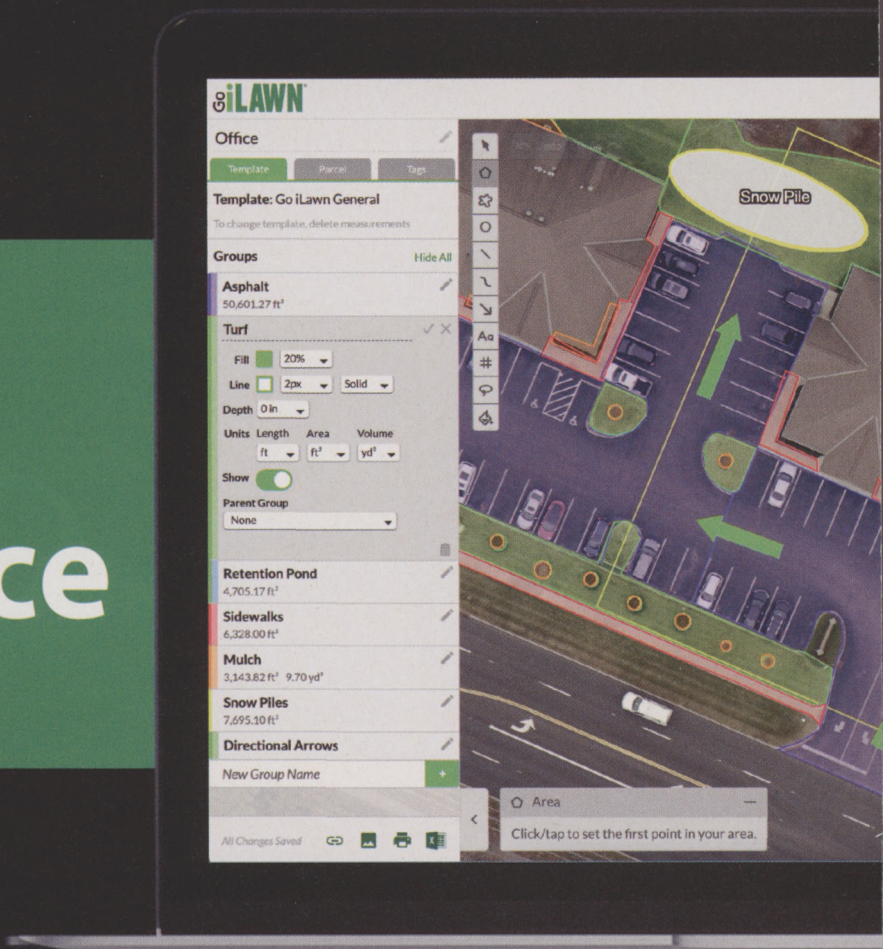
Although the company employs up to 95 retail/greenhouse staff and 55 lawn/landscape employees at peak, these numbers naturally fluctuate due to the seasonal nature of the business. While 17 of those 55 landscape employees are full-time salaried staff, Dan didn't want to lay off the rest of the team every winter and risk losing them for good.

About three years ago, Wasson started building up off-season services to keep the landscape crews busy. For example,





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the hardscape crews get foundations laid before the ground freezes, so weather permitting, they can work on patios all winter long. After Halloween, they start installing Christmas lights. If it snows, they switch to snow removal instead. In between, they might wash and wax the trucks or clean the shop.

These off-season options kept another 20 landscape employees working through the winter last year. "We're barely seasonal anymore," Yeagy says. As a result, the landscape division retains between 90-95% of its staff, with many part-time seasonal workers returning each spring.

"We've got a really good group of installers and landscapers, and I didn't want them going anywhere in the winter and getting another job and end up not coming back," Dan says. "The cost is worth it for us to keep (staff year-round), because it's far more expensive to the company if we don't get those guys back."

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INCREASING CAPACITY. After ramping up recruiting and retaining efforts, Wasson Nursery focused on maximizing the capacity of its crews to get the most productivity out of the team. "One way we've done that is implementing an employee incentive program," Yeagy says. "We look at the labor estimated for a job and the labor used for a job, and anytime they beat the estimated hours, there's a monetary incentive."

If a crew completes a job in fewer hours than estimated, the incentive is added to a monthly pool, which is split between the crew and its foreman. But if a job takes longer than estimated, money is taken from the pool at the same rate. The company determined that each hour saved is worth \$13. So, for saving 10 hours, the crew pool receives \$48.75 to split among the team, and the foreman receives \$81.25.

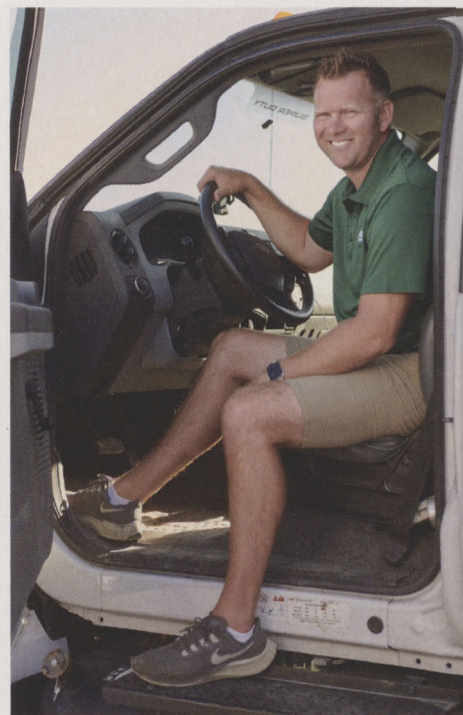
Monthly payouts average between \$2,500 and \$3,500. "Last year, we were able to pay out over \$40,000 in incentive

bonuses," Yeagy says. That incentivized efficiency saved the company more than 3,000 hours of extra capacity.

Of course, there's a catch. To make sure that crews don't rush through jobs, quality checks are part of the process as well. Project managers, designers and even Dan himself will evaluate projects regularly to make sure they meet the company's high standards.

Typically, project managers meet with foremen every morning and visit design-build jobsites daily to ensure that projects are progressing as planned. Complex enhancements may also require quality checks. If any problems need to be addressed — such as miss-cut pavers, unburied lighting wire or sections of lawn that require touchup — the extra time counts against the team.

Wasson uses incentive programs and other bonuses as motivation and to promote productivity.



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Wasson Nursery designed a fully customized fleet of trucks — all to improve crews' efficiency in the mornings.

However, Yeagy says it rarely comes down to that. "They want to do a good job and be proud of the work they do," he says.

"It's almost like we gamified it. We turned it into something exciting by saying, 'This is our expectation. How do we get better at this?' It forces our guys to focus on being effective."

To keep foremen and project managers on the same page when it comes to quality expectations, Wasson holds weekly training sessions to review the company standards. Meanwhile, incentive programs keep everyone accountable. While the incentives for foremen and crews focus on hours, the project managers' key performance indicators are based on quality and customer experience. When everyone meets their goals, jobs are completed correctly and on time.

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EQUIPPED FOR EFFICIENCY. The key to helping crews be more efficient in the field, Dan says, is equipping them with the tools they need to do the job. Five years ago, employees scrambled around every morning loading materials into their trucks, often stopping by the home improvement store to grab last-minute supplies.

“Now, we are extremely organized in the morning. I don’t want them going anywhere else but the jobsite,” Dan says. “You can set your crews up for success if you’ve got everything ready so they can focus on production.”

For example, Wasson stocks more inventory in-house now, ordering all the

materials for jobs upfront so crews have access to supplies throughout the project. Each landscape truck gets its own color-coded tools to cut down on loading time and confusion in the morning. Those tools stay locked inside toolboxes that are built-in to the company’s new customized fleet of Ford F-650 gas trucks.



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Dan's wife, Danielle, also works for the company as director of HR and communication.

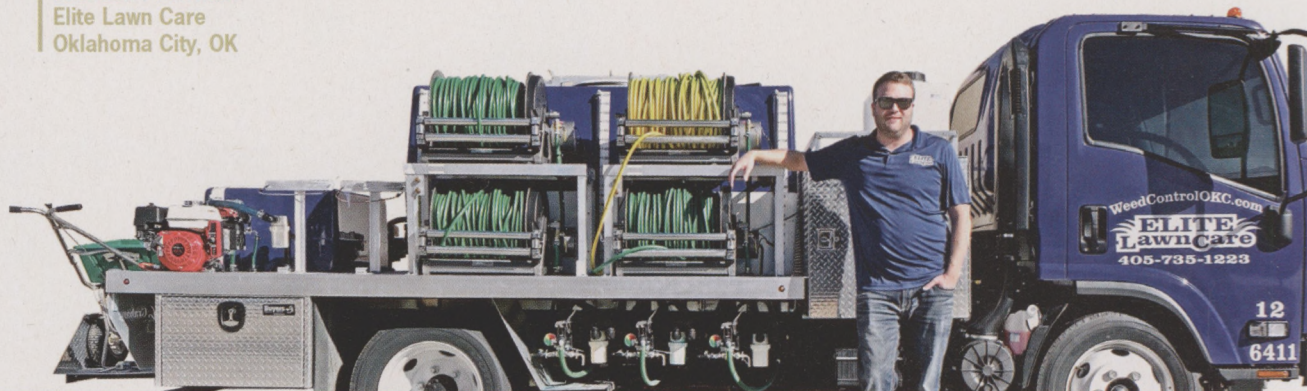
Dan worked with a fabricator to build his ideas onto a blank chassis. The customized truck beds feature 36-inch toolboxes behind the cab, drop sides, side lift gates, attached roll-out tarps, and barn doors in the back — all designed to increase the crew's efficiency.

"We're trying to buy equipment that can make our crews' jobs easier," Dan says. For example, he added side lift gates that can handle up to 2,000 pounds to save his crews from heavy lifting. He also added rear-view cameras in the back so drivers can hook up trailers without help.

Since finalizing the custom design about four years ago, Dan has updated about 10 of the landscape trucks so far, with plans to refresh the other half of the fleet as the trucks age. Meanwhile, he has also updated the Ford F-450s that the crews drive, adding custom aluminum flatbeds with underbody toolboxes to better serve their project needs, too.

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Brandon Peterman
Elite Lawn Care
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SPECIFICATION



PRODUCT SOURCING



DELIVERY



INSTALLATION



MAINTENANCE CONSULTING



Dan has been a part of Wasson Nursery ever since he was a 3-year-old boy going to jobsites with his father.

CARRYING ON THE FAMILY LEGACY. From the trucks to the high-tech systems that run behind-the-scenes, Wasson Nursery looks a lot different than it did 45 years ago. Watching that transition hasn't been easy for Dan Sr.

"The biggest challenge is just being able to let go and give up something I built from a wheelbarrow," Dan Sr. says. "Everything I had set in place got changed. I hate change. I didn't think it was necessary, but I guess you need to learn that your way's not always the best."

For 40 years, Dan Sr. estimated landscape designs in his head, taking a certain percentage of the plant price to determine the cost of planting it. When his son took over the landscape design business, "he threw it out the window and changed the way we estimated," Dan Sr. says, "and man, I didn't like that."

Instead, Dan began estimating jobs based on the hours required to install each design, using technology to track and calculate labor. "It was a couple years of back-and-forth, with dad being very upset that we weren't doing it by percentage," Dan says. "But with the percentage, there was no way to make that scalable when we started adding staff."

They butted heads for a while, but now, the new system is working, the company is growing and even Dan Sr. is pleased with the change.

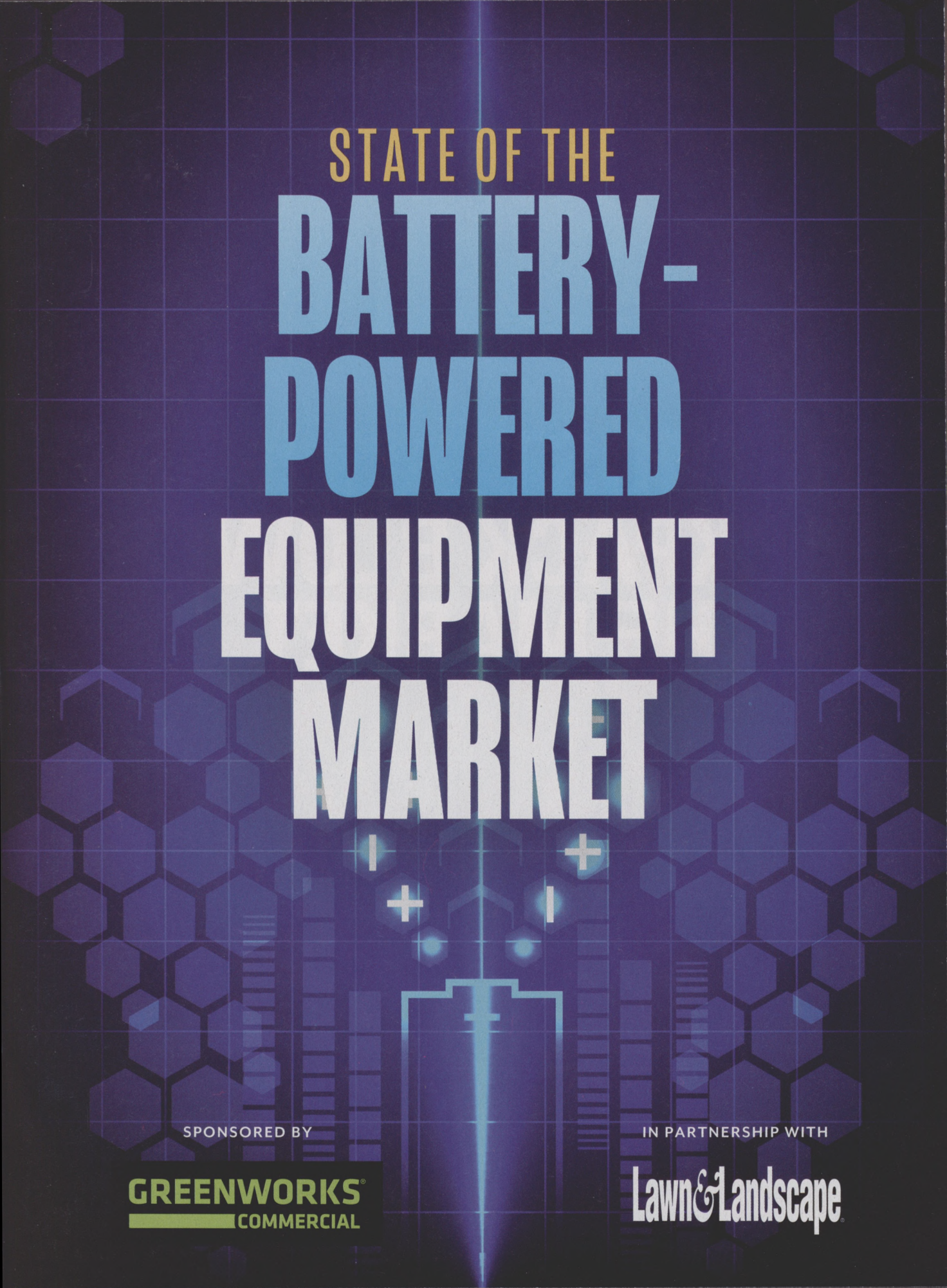
"Changes have to happen for your business to grow," he says. "The sooner you can accept that, as hard as it is, the easier it is to move on and the happier everyone will be."

Dan Sr. says he's blessed to work beside his sons as they lead Wasson Nursery into the next generation of growth. Although he officially retired in February 2022 when Dan became CEO, Dan Sr. continues working in Wasson's greenhouse. "I'm never gonna quit, because I love it," Dan Sr. says. "If I'm physically able to put in a helping hand, I'll be here." **L&L**

The author is a freelance writer based in Ohio.



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Fully- CHARGED

Battery-powered equipment continues to be embraced by the green industry.

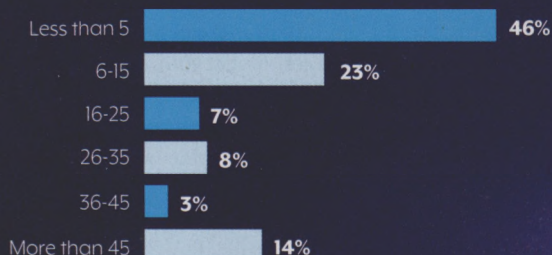
By Kim Lux and Jimmy Miller

While gas prices have lowered as of mid-July, it's still pretty expensive to fill up. But it was another aspect of fuel that tied into why people use battery-powered equipment, according to our survey results. Lack of fumes was one of the higher-ranking positive aspects of using the equipment. And compared to last year's research, more landscapers are using the equipment. Last year, 42% said they don't use any battery-powered equipment, compared to 30% this year.

As far as barriers to the equipment, run time being too short was again at the top of the list, but expense was second this year, while recharging time ranked in that spot last year.

These results come from 282 landscape contractors. Please note that not all numbers will add to 100% due to rounding.

How many **EMPLOYEES** do you have?



What was your company's **OVERALL GROSS REVENUE** for 2021?

33%

Less than
\$200,000

18%

\$200,000-
\$499,000

8%

\$500,000-
\$749,000

7%

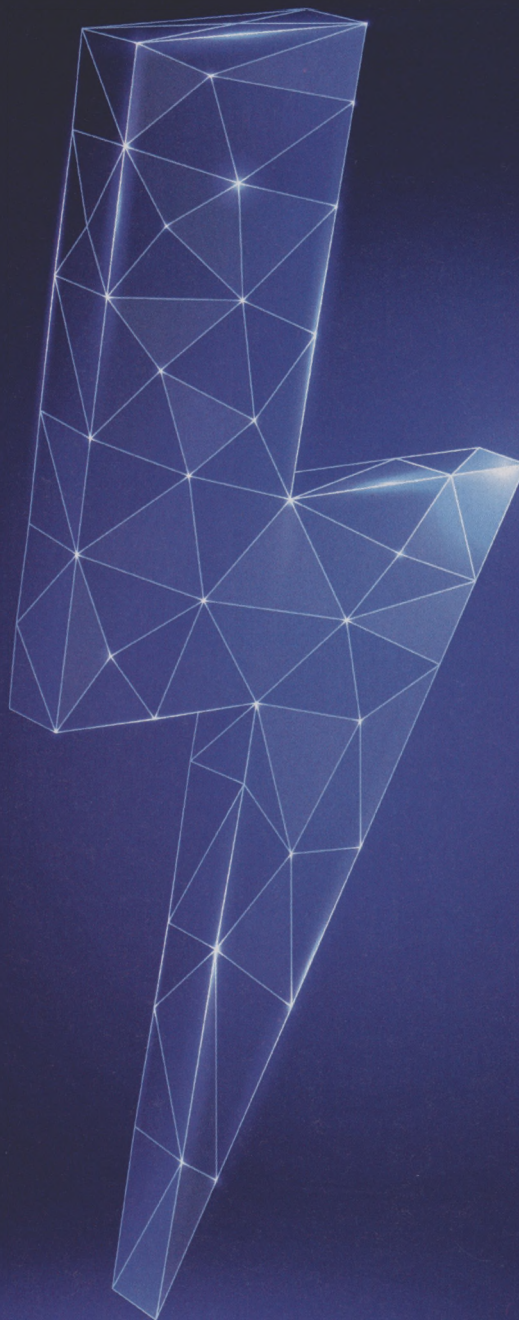
\$750,000-
\$999,000

23%

\$1 million -
\$6.9 million

11%

\$7 million
or more





WHAT BATTERY-POWERED/ELECTRIC EQUIPMENT DO YOU USE AT YOUR LANDSCAPING OR LAWN CARE COMPANY?

Check all that apply

3%

Vehicles

4%

Autonomous mower

16%

Riding/
walk-behind/
stand-on mower

29%

Chainsaw

30%

Don't use
any battery-
powered/electric
equipment

37%

Edger/string
trimmer

43%

Hedge
trimmer

54%

Blower

Other: Backpack sprayer



JESSE FULLER

Owner, Fullers Company

OAK BLUFFS, MASS.



Fuller has two kids, one in high school and another in middle school. As he runs his eight-man team in Oak Bluffs, Massachusetts, he keeps them in mind. He wants to operate a business that not only makes money but is one that his whole family can respect.

That's why the Fullers Company uses battery-powered equipment as much as possible. Whether it's a commercial zero-turn or it's an electric steel saw, they have jumped so far into the technology that they have a box truck complete with banks for charging the equipment on the go.

But for Fuller, it's not about firing first and asking questions second; it's about looking before you leap into new technology.

"It's something I always wanted to do," Fuller says. "When I first started my business 25 years ago, I wanted to be as green and as natural as possible, but it had to make sense as a business decision. Every time I see something new that's electric that comes out, we try to convert over whenever it's possible."

That said, he hadn't noticed technology that could handle commercial work capably until roughly three years ago; by and large, it had all been small residential equipment that could work with batteries. And even then, he had issues keeping batteries charged long enough for substantial work to get done.

Fuller has a background in solar work, so the idea of buying a solar-powered truck to recharge equipment came naturally.

"As a commercial business, you'd have to have five million batteries on board," he says. "The only way to do that was to do something with a solar lawn truck."

Fuller recommends that anybody who's interested in battery-powered equipment do some research on their own. How many minutes can you get on one charge? How much do replacement or extra batteries cost? And when might you see a return on investment? These are all valid questions, ones that Fuller asked himself as he made the decision to buy.

Fuller also believes that the technology will continue to improve, increasing battery charge and runtime. For example, he's noticed that electric blowers are less powerful than the gas ones, so even as someone who's fully onboard with electric equipment, he sometimes needs to revert back to the old ways.

"If you've got a wet, rainy day," he says, "we've still got to break out the gas ones, but we try not to."



JOSEPH CERBONE
President, JLC Landscape Services
WESTHAMPTON BEACH, N.Y.

In Westhampton Beach, N.Y., Cerbone has just started his 10-person team on battery-powered blowers.

Cerbone admits it's largely born out of necessity. It's not that he's unwilling to switch to battery-powered equipment over gas-powered; he'd love to help reduce his environmental impact as much as he can. But even after years of seeing promised improvements, he said the commercial-grade equipment still falls short.

"I still don't feel as if the technology has caught up with how much we use the equipment in an eight-hour workday," he says. "If the technology is there, then I'd find a way to do it."

In his area, Cerbone says city officials recently decided to ban gas-powered blowers in certain parts of town. In the estate part of town, the ban is permanent; in other areas, the ban is only in effect annually from May to September.

For as quickly as his team pivoted, Cerbone says they've still hit this snag where the batteries are depleted of power after 90 minutes. He gives each crew an extra

**ARE YOU AWARE OF ANY
EXISTING OR DEVELOPING EFFORTS
TO BAN GAS EQUIPMENT IN YOUR
COMMUNITY OR STATE?**

37%
YES

63%
NO

battery, too, but after three hours, they will still use gas-powered equipment if the job's not done.

"The guys are very smart about knowing which towns they need to use the (electric) blowers. I think the first offense, which I haven't seen them enforce it yet, is like a \$250 fine," Cerbone says. "And I'm like, 'You're going to start fining crew members for using (gas) blowers? At least at the end of the day, they have to have (electric blowers) on the truck.'"

Cerbone says his teams are skeptical about the gas-powered bans. "They were kind of laughing like, 'How are we going to do this?'" he says, adding that he reminds his crews to use battery-powered as much as possible. If anyone ever pulls his teams over for using the gas equipment, he says they should demonstrate that they tried using electric first. If they are still getting flack, they should put Cerbone on the phone.

Cerbone believes the electric blowers he uses are heavier and more awkward than their lightweight gas components. Plus, to keep his batteries charged, he thinks it's ironic that the sound and emissions of a charger could be just as cumbersome to communities as the gas-powered equipment in general.

That's not to say he won't keep his mind open. Cerbone has often made smaller changes in less dramatic fashion that are more environmentally conscious, like recycling his grass clippings or using low-risk organic fertilizers. But, between being forced into this move and not feeling like the technology's ready, Cerbone begrudgingly has gone from an outspoken skeptic to cautiously cooperative.

"They almost seemed like they had their mind made up," Cerbone says. "That's just my opinion. Everyone has their own opinions on what happened, but either way, they imposed the law. I really could've been a proponent of it, but I haven't seen technology catch up with the demand."

ZACK RULLI Co-owner, Dirt and Stone Landscaping, NEWINGTON, CT.

**FOR RULLI
THERE'S A LOT
TO CONSIDER**

before diving deeper into battery-powered equipment.

"Right now, we have a string trimmer, leaf blower, hedge trimmer and we're looking to add to that as equipment comes up for replacement," he says.

Rulli says the best way he's



been able to research battery-powered equipment is by testing them out firsthand.

"Any time a dealer has an open house, we go out and try everything," he says. "The biggest thing for us is getting it in our hands and trying it for ourselves... you realize it's not vibrating, it's not hot, it doesn't smell, and you don't have to sit there and keep pulling and pulling to try and start it."

In terms of power for the

battery-powered equipment, Rulli says it's taken some adjusting for him and his crews.

"Getting used to not having to go full throttle the piece of equipment has been a challenge," he says. "You get more battery life without having to go full throttle all the time... for crews it was an adjustment in power. ...When they'd run out of battery, you'd have to tell them to cut back. They finally trained themselves and got through it."

Rulli says the equipment is also nice during peak season when scorching temperatures used to make the old tools temperamental.

"When it's hot and humid they just don't run well," he says of gas-powered. "You don't have to worry about it stalling out. You don't have to worry about mixing the gas, or that hopefully someone remembered to mix the gas, and changing spark plugs, fuel filters and all that."

ANDI CASEBERE

production training coordinator,
Mariani Landscape

CHICAGO, ILL.



When several Chicagoland neighborhoods started implementing leaf blower restrictions, Mariani Landscapes knew it had to come up with a way to continue providing pristine lawns to its clients. The solution — battery-powered equipment.

"We have seven communities we serve that have blower restrictions between May and October," Casebere explains.

Casebere says the regulations are so strict the company is committed to 100% compliance at all times.

"The ban forced our hand," he says. "There are some communities where the citizens will take a picture and send it in, and the police will be out to issue you a ticket."

But Casebere says the battery-powered blowers and other hand tools have been working out great.

When it came to getting crews on board though, Casebere acknowledges that it took a little time. Some employees were skeptical of the level of power these machines had.

"A lot of these battery packs don't last the whole day, so the one thing we had to focus on with training was changing how we did things," he says. "We got really comfortable with high-powered, gas-powered blowers. But now we have to go and rake and broom things out of our way and then use the blower to detail. You're always going to get

ARE YOU AWARE
OF ANY HOUR
RESTRICTIONS
WHEN USING GAS
EQUIPMENT IN
YOUR STATE OR
COMMUNITY?

42%
YES

58%
NO

some level of pushback and guys saying, 'Do we really have to do that?' But you just have to go out there, walk them through it and ensure them that it's a process that isn't overwhelming."

Though the power level is comparable for the most part, Casebere admits it's still nice to break out the gas-powered blowers when it's allowed.

"Most communities allow us to use gas-powered blowers again when it comes to spring and fall cleanups, which helps," he notes.

After the success of the battery-powered blowers, Mariani Landscape is ready to take it to the next level. Casebere says they're going to be utilizing autonomous mowers very soon. After testing out several brands and trying them at local libraries and parks, the company has made the commitment.

Casebere says he expects it to take a little while to get customers on board with the machines though.

"The clients need to understand that it's not going to make lines in the traditional way we would stripe a law," he says. "But after a month of the operation, you don't really see the lines anymore. You just see a nice, tight turf."

Casebere adds he's expecting this shift toward autonomous mowing to help with staffing issues and efficiency as well.

"Where labor is these days, wherever we can save monotonous time behind a machine and have all these well-skilled workers working on other things the better it is for us," he says. "Our goal is to have our employees focused on different things...so we can do more work in a day out of that truck."

GERHART ARNDT founder, Sustainable Land Solutions, CONSHOHOCKEN, PA.

WHEN ARNDT STARTED HIS COMPANY two years ago, providing sustainable lawn care was his driving force. To achieve this, he made a large investment in battery-powered equipment.

Early on, Arndt knew there'd be limitations in terms of runtime when it came to the equipment. So, he went to his local bank and took out a loan to purchase two large batteries to continually power all his equipment throughout the workday.

"What I do to get all day runtime is have two big batteries

that go inside my vehicle...and I just plug my chargers in and charge my equipment batteries all day long," he says. "I really only have two sets of string trimmer batteries. It gets used and then thrown on the charger. And then the other is used, and we swap back out."

Arndt says procuring more power is essential when going



all electric. "Before this setup I couldn't work a full day. I'd be able to do half a day and then I'd be out of battery," he says. "That was a major gamechanger."

According to Arndt, another advantage of the bigger charging batteries is he is no longer beholden to one brand of equipment.

"If you don't have an on-the-go charging solution, you're cornered into sticking with only one brand," he says. "Whereas with on-the-go charging...I didn't have to buy the entire line just

to have a massive amount of batteries."

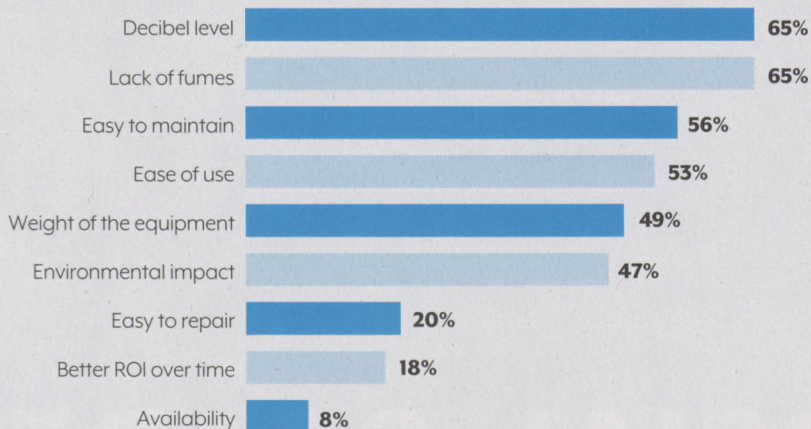
But while the bigger batteries may have been a major investment, Arndt says he still finds it more profitable than running gas-powered equipment.

This is especially important given how fuel costs continue to rise and fluctuate.

"It's so much cheaper to run battery in the long run. I pay 10 cents per kilowatt," he says. "I think I'm using like \$2 a day on my biggest days. That's not even a half gallon of gas right now."

WHAT DO YOU SEE AS POSITIVE ASPECTS OF BATTERY-POWERED/ELECTRIC EQUIPMENT?

Check all that apply



KAZWEL LEVANDOSKI

owner, Lone Goose

WINNIPEG, CANADA



The ease of maintenance is what drew Levandoski's eye to battery-powered equipment when he started his business in 2017. Back then, he was a one-man operation.

"Gas-powered units require quite a bit of maintenance and as an owner-operator business time was of value," he says.

"It started out with me not wanting to spend the time doing a bunch of maintenance on the machines plus with a desire to try something out that was a little bit more eco-friendly."

Nowadays, the company is up to six employees servicing about 150 sites.

"And we're doing well over 90% of that work with battery-powered equipment," Levandoski notes.

One of the biggest blessings of the battery-powered equipment, Levandoski says, is the lack of noise pollution. It's something he knows customers appreciate.

"Our clients love that they never hear us working," he says. "We're quiet, efficient and it's cost effective."

He says crews appreciate the absence of droning engine noise, too.

"My staff have said they prefer the battery to the commercial gas mowers," he says. "They can listen to their music and whatnot. The other aspect my crew really likes is that they are very lightweight. So, when we're loading them in and out of trucks one person can do it no problem. And they're very easy to operate."

Efficiency has also improved because of the battery-powered equipment.

"Crew management is quite a bit more efficient," he says. "Now I'm not worrying about staff running to the gas station to fill up jerrycans and stuff like that. There's no downtime filling things up, it's we pop out a battery, pop in a new one and go."

Levandowski says he knows there are some challenges to running battery equipment, like the need to constantly be charging and a difference in power, but he says most problems are easy to get past. The type of landscape being maintained can also cause a challenge.

"The other real limitation I've seen is we have to make sure our blades are very sharp," he says. "We swap out blades daily or every other day just to make sure the batteries don't have to work harder. And because they have a little less power than gas-powered machines, the moment we get wet or tall grass the sharper blades are really beneficial."



WHAT ARE THE BARRIERS TO INCREASING YOUR USE OF BATTERY-POWERED/ELECTRIC COMMERCIAL EQUIPMENT?

Check all that apply

3%

I don't know where to get the equipment.

11%

I don't know how to perform maintenance or how to find a mechanic to service them.

5%

I don't feel comfortable with them.

42%

Not enough power

5%

Hassle of training the crew how to use.

56%

Recharging the equipment takes too long.

11%

I'm not familiar with them.

59%

Equipment/battery are too expensive.

11%

No barriers

65%

Run time is too short.



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TURN TO

TECH

Green Magic Landscape jumped into technology during the COVID-19 pandemic and hasn't looked back since.

By Kim Lux

It took a global pandemic for Green Magic Landscape of Mobile, Alabama, to start embracing technology. But the company's COO, Carita Koen, wishes they would have made the effort sooner.

"COVID was when we really had to pivot and adjust and embrace technology," she says. "I think everyone at that time was in a pivot stage just because COVID was weird, unpredictable and overwhelming."

Koen says that's when the world saw an even bigger influx of people buying products online. She knew the company had to cash in on this trend.

"Everyone uses technology for something," she says. "They pay their bills online, shop, ordering transportation and food — all that's online. Everybody was using technology, and I just thought, 'How could we use technology in our business to benefit us and our customers?'"

GOING VIRTUAL. One thing Green Magic did was make it easy for prospective clients to get a quote online.

"During the pandemic, we started offering virtual quotes, and it's been the best thing since sliced bread for us," Koen says. "When we'd go to people's houses, they wanted to talk to us, but they didn't



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Above: The coronavirus pandemic forced everyone to buy more online. So Green Magic Landscape started offering easy, virtual quotes on its website.

Story continues on page 50



Todd Lowe
Green Solutions
Team Specialist

Remove risk from your mix with Celsius XTRA

By **Todd Lowe**, Bayer Green Solutions Team

What are the most unique benefits of Celsius® XTRA?

Celsius XTRA brings the trusted broadleaf weed control and turf safety of Celsius® WG, now with sedge control. This “all-in-one” solution reduces the number of herbicide bottles needed on trucks and reduces the problems with mixing errors, including poor weed control, turf injury or both.

How does Celsius XTRA help lawn care operators face challenges they see on a daily basis?

There are a host of weeds and a variety of different warm-season turfgrasses found on southern lawns. It is difficult to know how to properly identify weeds or turf types and understand which products perform best in each situation. Also, with the high turnover that can occur in today's labor market, trying to educate new work-

ers as well as making certain that they properly mix products to control each different type of weed can be difficult. Celsius XTRA removes the worry of mixing different herbicides to control weeds on most warm-season lawns.

How does Celsius XTRA compare to other herbicide options on the market?

Celsius XTRA is a very broad-spectrum product, controlling more than 100 lawn weeds! In fact, Celsius XTRA controls nearly twice as many sedges as its closest competitors. In addition to broadleaf weeds and sedges, many of our customers feel that it provides a similar level of grassy weed control as Celsius WG. Some “all-in-one” products still require additional products to provide effective, season-long sedge control, while others can cause unacceptable turf injury.



Is Celsius XTRA particularly effective on any specific problem weeds?

Research from the past several years shows that Celsius XTRA provides excellent sedge and kyllinga control. Many sedges are controlled with just one application, but difficult perennial sedges such as purple and yellow nutsedge require two low-rate applications for season-long control. It also works well on difficult weeds such as dollarweed, chamberbitter, dove-weed and Virginia buttonweed.

Can you speak to the turf tolerance of Celsius XTRA?

With the exception of bahiagrass, Celsius XTRA is safe on all major warm-season turfgrasses (St. Augustinegrass, centipedegrass, bermudagrass, zoysiagrass), similar to Celsius WG. Some flashing or growth regulation can occur with most herbicides when temperatures exceed 90° F, which can also occur with Celsius XTRA, but this is generally short-lived.

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***Take charge with broadleaf weed
and sedge control in one solution.***



**Celsius[®]
XTRA**

New Celsius[®] XTRA eliminates the need for tank-mixing by combining our trusted broadleaf weed formula with the added control of sedges.

One simple, broad-spectrum postemergence herbicide eliminates tank-mixing, additional product measuring, and other unnecessary hassles that can harm lawns and your operation. Celsius XTRA offers excellent turf safety on all major warm-season species including St. Augustinegrass and provides just the right mix of more control, less risk and greater peace of mind.

Start spraying with confidence at es.bayer.us/CelsiusXTRA



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Story continues from page 47

really want to be around us. We wanted to make it beneficial for them to get a quote virtually."

Not only was the online option nice for customers, but Koen says the business benefited dramatically.

"We were spending a lot of time in traffic going to people's homes to do estimates," she says. "Then we'd have to get back, put the numbers in, do the estimate and it would just take a while. We figured if we could incorporate technology into our sales process, it'd make us more efficient and more profitable."

Koen says it's done just that, adding that the software used for the virtual quotes was well worth the investment.

"It's not expensive," she says. "I think we spent more in gas driving to people's homes than we paid for the software."

The software is user-friendly for everyone, something that's important to ensure people use it.

"The system we use allows you to go to our website and fill out a form and upload a project video," Koen says. "You just turn the camera to landscape mode, and you can talk, point to things and walk us through it on the video."

"With the system we use, you don't have to be a super tech-savvy person to utilize it," she adds.

Koen says the software is always evolving, and Green Magic is eagerly anticipating its next update.

"They are getting ready to make it correspond with Google Earth, so that'll make it even easier to measure areas," she says.

EASE OF EXECUTION. Whether its quoting software, accounting software, fleet tracking or anything else, Koen says that when it comes to utilizing technology efficiently — it all starts with the implementation.

She suggests instituting a top-down approach to ensure a seamless transition process. For Green Magic, that means Koen and her husband, CEO Larry Koen, are the first to test things out.

"My husband and I learn to do everything in-house before we bring our team on board," she says. "I think that's very important. As business owners, we don't want

"As business owners, we don't want to be the best at everything because you should have people on your team that do some things better than you, but we think it's important to know how the process works."

— CARITA KOEN, COO,
GREEN MAGIC



Larry Koen, CEO, and Carita Koen, COO, of Green Magic Landscape.

to be the best at everything because you should have people on your team that do some things better than you, but we think it's important to know how the process works. That way when there's an issue or we have to do some conflict resolution, we can step in and take it from there."

According to Koen, the next step in implementing something new is establishing a trial period to prove whether the technology is functional and profitable.

"Anytime that we're utilizing a new system, I'll basically do a trial period for 90 days," she says. "I think that with anything you do, 90 days is the sweet spot to let you know if something is working or not."

After a new concept or technology is rolled out, Koen says listening to those most impacted by it also helps gauge its success.

"We rely on the feedback from our cus-

tomers to let us know if something new we're using is working," she says. "We want to rely on those who keep us in business in the first place because their opinions matter."

Equally as important as customer feedback is employees' reactions.

"We also rely on our employees because they have to do the work," she says. "If there's something that we're implementing that they find is too complicated or takes too many steps, we like to sit down with them right away. It can usually be worked out. A lot of the times it's a communication issue or a training issue."

BREATHE A SIGH OF RELIEF. For Koen, the advantages of technology make things easy at every turn.

"Technology has allowed me to see my husband more instead of just seeing him leaving, especially during peak season" she jokes.

One of the reasons for this is automation, and Koen says that's been a big time-saver for everyone.

"Doing the virtual quotes has been awesome, but having a system to automate everything and having those programs speak to one another has been awesome," she says. "We'd spend so much time in the office re-entering the same information into different software systems. Now it goes to CRM and that speak to another system, and they all speak to each other."

Automating the office has helped in all elements of the business. Koen says that's been most beneficial.

"Embracing technology has made us more efficient," she says. "Our response rates are quicker, and our turnaround time for creating projects is quicker."

Koen admits to sleeping better at night after making technology a priority.

"All of us as business owners have things we stress about and some of it can be controlled and some of it cannot... But technology will just make you more organized, and organization increases efficiency, productivity and revenue," she says. "Technology has made us more organized, and for that I'm very thankful." **L&L**

The author is an assistant editor with Lawn & Landscape.

OWN IT



JOHN DEERE



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75G
85G



317G



318G



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310L

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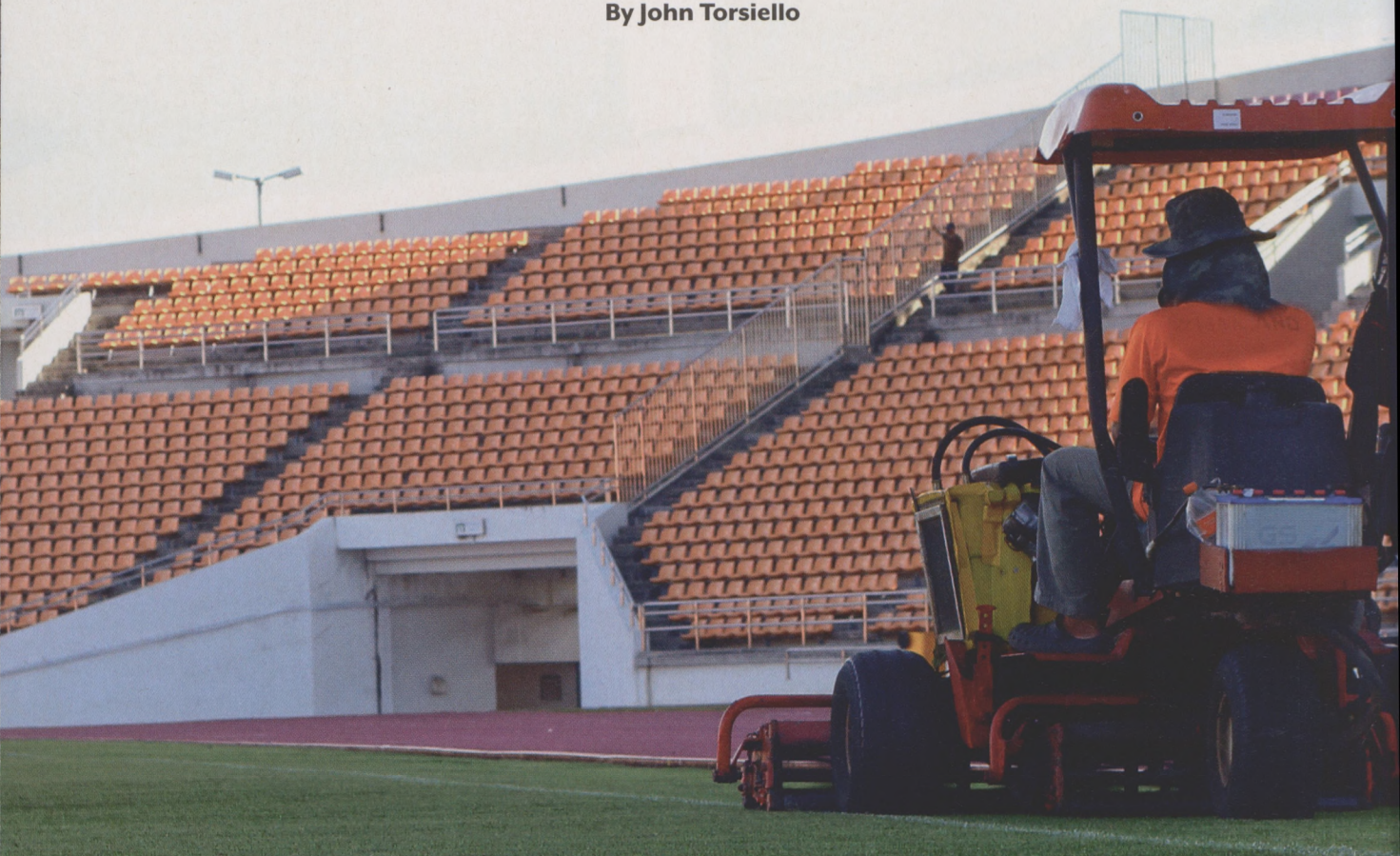
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A W H O L E N E W B A L L G A M E

Tending to sports turf seems like an obvious add-on for landscapers and lawn care operators, but there's a lot to consider before making the move.

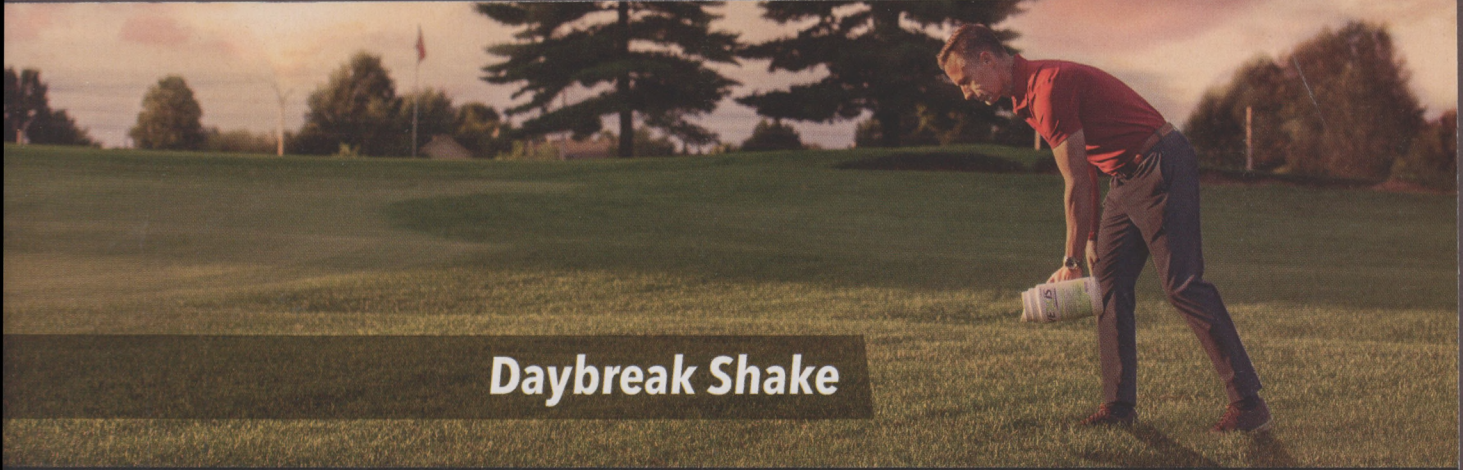
By John Torsiello



ADDING A SPORTS FIELDS MAINTENANCE SERVICE CAN ADD REVENUE FOR A COMPANY, but it's an undertaking that must be approached carefully and with much consideration. Sometimes it calls for a sizeable expenditure for equipment and having the right people with boots on the ground to make the job run smoothly.

Jeffrey Fowler, extension educator at Penn State University, says there are eight main elements of maintaining sports turf: soil testing, lie and fertilizer, mowing, aeration, top dressing, over seeding, the playing surface itself and transition areas.

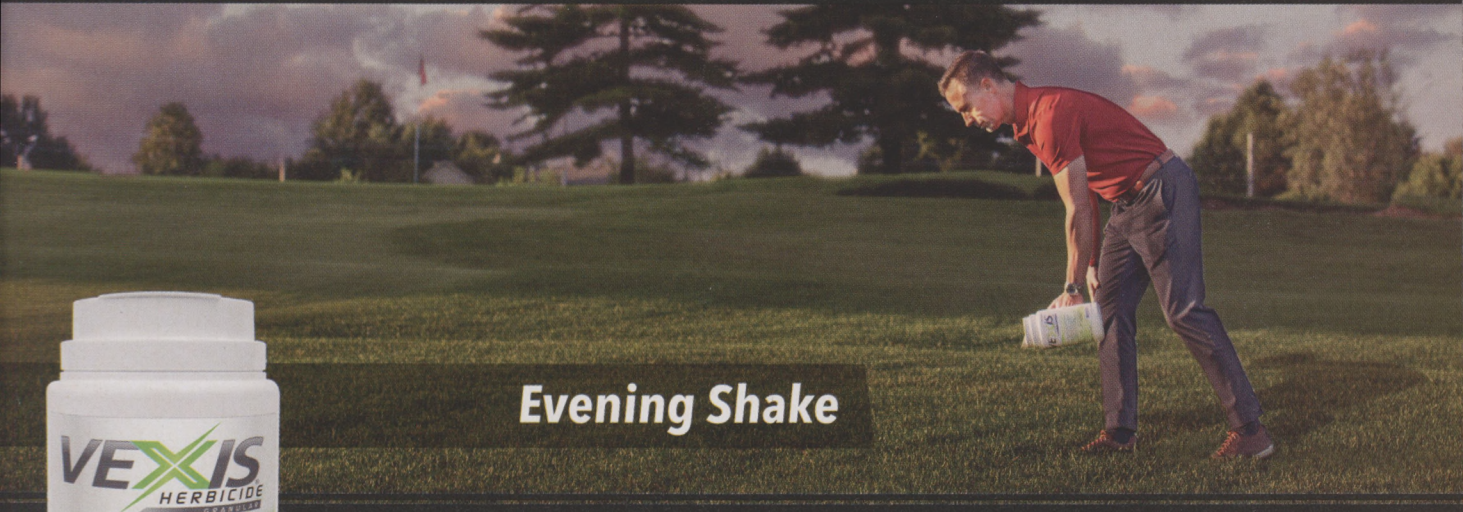
"I have been called to countless athletic fields to lend some advice to the athletic field manager, school custodian or the school board member that wanted a better field for the young athletes in their district," Fowler says. "After a few stops with the similar answers, I realized that many people were forgetting the basic steps that we need to keep in the forefront when maintaining athletic fields."



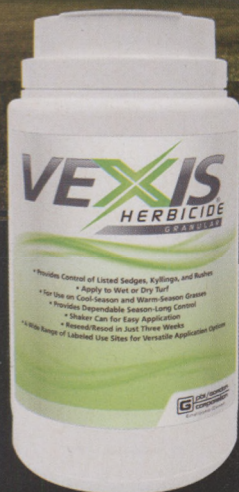
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"When you think of what equipment is needed and the way it is maintained, sports turf is very similar to a golf course," says Michael Flowers, founder and a consultant to Championship Turf Services of Connecticut.

"You are doing a lot of aeration, top dressing and inputting fertilizer, herbicides and pesticides when called for. In fact, when hiring personnel, I look (for) people with turf degrees or those that actually are coming from a golf course."

SIMILARITIES AND DIFFERENCES. Workers already on the staff can make the jump from commercial and residential lawn care to sports fields if you decide to offer that service, but they need to be properly trained to not only cut and care for grass but also to be your eyes in the field, especially when you are dealing with a 25- to 30-acre sports field complex.

"The crew is mowing, fertilizing and other chores and can spot a problem so it can be nipped in the bud," Flowers says.

"We have found the greatest success when a member of our team is involved with the club or has a player on the team. By having eyes on the field, sometimes daily but minimum weekly, we can head off potential problems that we can fix."

**— PHILLIP SANDERS,
TRAINING MANAGER AT
KING GREEN IN MICHIGAN**

The cost of procuring all the necessary equipment to properly maintain sports fields is something companies should consider if wanting to offer this add-on service.

"Sports turf has so many different levels of play," says Phillip Sanders, training manager at King Green in Michigan. "We focus on youth club sports with the occasional high school field.

"My oldest son worked as a collegiate baseball grounds keeper. Every time he went to his younger brother's baseball game, he would complain about the quality of the field. The lesser-demanding sports fields are better for LCOs to add to their business. High-quality fields are a specialty and demand special attention."

To Sanders, the big difference in sports turf maintenance from commercial and residential is, of course, the size of the task and the frequency of fertilizer application compared to commercial/residential. "We give eight applications for residential and 12 applications for sports turf," he says.

Adding sports turf to your offerings, says Sanders, is "tricky." "We have found the greatest success when a member of our team is involved with the club or has a player on the team.

"By having eyes on the field, sometimes daily but minimum weekly, we can head off potential problems that we can fix," he says. "The large problems we can only identify, educate and develop the best workaround we can. When clubs and schools hire LCOs like King Green, they develop and maintain safer playing surfaces for the student athlete."

Communication between the field manager and those using the fields is vital, Fowler says. "We have to let people around us, our bosses, supervisors, coaches, players, volunteer parents and school administrators know what we know. Not only what we need for a safer and more playable field, but also why we need it," he adds.

"Our jobs as sports turf managers are to

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“On the mowing side you can have crews that cross over from commercial and residential to sports fields, but I really want someone with background in sports turf or turfgrass management involved ...”

— JAMIN DEJONG,
TENDER LAWN CARE
IN MICHIGAN

Schedules for maintaining sports fields need to be flexible especially during the seasons when the field is in high demand.

maintain fields, their job is to do something else. We need to communicate our needs and our reasons for our needs so that they better understand the importance of the eight steps.”

Flowers says because of potential litigation against the owner or manager of the fields, the playing surface demands meticulous care.

He says an ongoing and detailed conversation between those overseeing the field and you is crucial to ensuring the field or fields are always in pristine condition.

Flowers says adding sports turf maintenance was a leap of faith of sorts. “I was a landscape contractor and had a lot of hydro-seeding business, so in the late 1990s

I figured rather than having a division for sports field maintenance, I would do it full time. People thought I was crazy, but we now do only sports fields and have many clients,” he says.

MAJOR INVESTMENT. Jamin DeJong owns Tender Lawn Care in Michigan and maintains athletic field complexes with baseball and soccer fields. Having the right equipment is necessary, but DeJong says even more important is making sure you have the right people for the job.

“On the mowing side, you can have crews that cross over from commercial and residential to sports fields, but I really want someone with background in sports turf or

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turfgrass management involved because you have to be knowledgeable when looking for and managing diseases and other problems that occur on the sports fields," he says.

"This all needs to be done while meeting the expectations of the client and keeping playing surfaces as safe as possible," he says. "When you are working on high-use sports fields, there is less room for error and being proactive really does matter."

DeJong says that before you jump into sports turf management, you need to carefully examine whether you can afford the equipment necessary to meet the demands of maintaining athletic fields, frequent mowing of large areas, deep tine aeration, sand top dressing and possibly specialized fertilization, herbicide and pesticide applications based on soil tests and micro site conditions.

"You are greatly increasing the frequency of mowing and fertilization when you are dealing with a sports field as opposed to, say, a commercial property. Someone needs to be the 'eyes on site' so small issues can be dealt with before they become big problems. Ongoing communication with your point of contact is key," he adds.

Flowers says that athletic fields in the northern climate will likely be bluegrass while poa annua and fescue varieties that are avoided. "We are always fighting poa annua and fescue grass can be slippery, which you don't want on a sports field," he explains. Southern fields are likely to be Bermuda grass.

Sports turf has compacted soil from usage and often don't drain particularly well, often puddling in low spots. "It's harder to maintain than a golf course in some ways," Flowers says. "Because a school or town doesn't have the budget that a golf club has."

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Certain areas of sports field need maximum attention; the goalmouth and midfield areas on a soccer field and the infield of baseball or softball fields for instance.

"You wind up doing a lot of over seeding in these areas," says Flowers. "One thing you can't use on a sports field is a zero turn mower because it might damage the turf when making a turn."

Flowers says the work crews have to know that they aren't just lowering the rear tailgate of a truck and mowing, they have to be trained for the task and ready to address any problems on the field.

"You have to be proactive in meeting the customer's needs, which can vary during the year," he says. "There may be smaller windows to get the job done because fields are sometimes used every day of the week or most days, so you have to work hand-in-hand with the field manager to set up a maintenance schedule that can change from week to week and day to day." **L&L**

The author is a freelance writer based in Connecticut.



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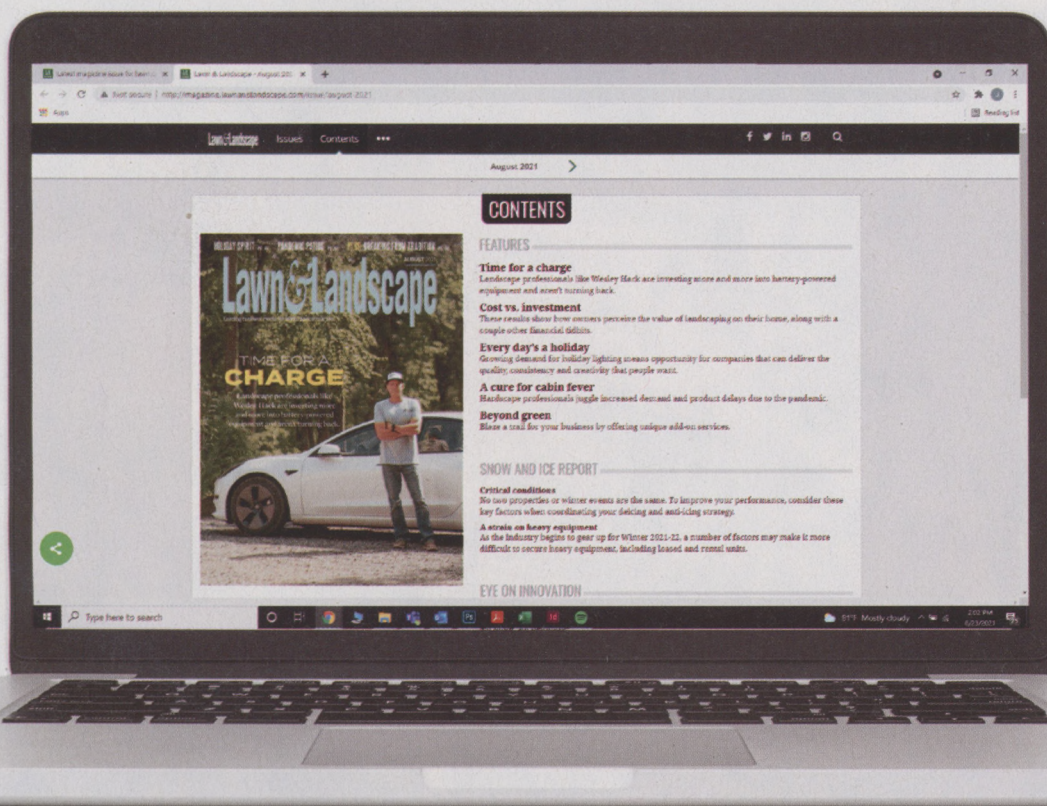
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It's about more than stringing lights when providing profitable holiday lighting services.

By Kim Lux

Whether it's a cowboy Christmas out west or a traditional winter wonderland in suburbia, holiday lighting and decorating can be a valuable add-on service to offer.

Not only can it provide recurring revenue from valued customers, but it can also serve as a strategic brand building and marketing tool.

In Wickenburg, Arizona, Aaron Wolfe, president of Wickenburg Landscape, says there's so much more that goes into the service than stringing lights on a roofline.

"When we do it, we don't do it as a traditional service. We call it holiday decorations as opposed to holiday lighting because we do a lot more than just lighting," he says.

DESIRED DECOR. Being out in the desert puts a twist on the traditional holiday staples that Wolfe says his team uses to decorate. Most homes have a cactus or two and even some agave that Wickenburg highlights in its decorating.

"We do a little bit of lighting, but a lot of it is wrapping Saguaro," Wolfe says of the popular cactus species. "We turn those into candy canes."

"We double strand the red-mini lights and wrap them on a 45-degree angle and wrap them up each of the arms. Then we take the clear bulbs and do those. It makes them look like a candy cane and we'll put a Santa hat on top of them, too. We like to have fun with that."

And while clients love the fun, festive desert décor, one of the biggest sellers for the company is more of a classic touch.

"The big thing we do are live wreaths," Wolfe says. "That's a big thing out here. We do them from 16-inch all the way up to 60-inch. We do them inside, outside — wherever customers want them."

Wolfe says preparing these wreaths is no small feat, adding that they are tailor-made to be cohesive inside each customer's home.

"My wife and another employee in our office get together and they do a lot of color coordinating," he says. "They go into a house to see what the furniture is like, what color are the cushions, the walls and they color coordinate the wreaths to that."

This attention to detail makes these wreaths a big success, Wolfe says. And customers keep wanting more year after year.

"It's one of the biggest sellers we do," he says. "It's not cheap, but it's stunning and totally makes the house. They're live wreaths so they have that special smell to them, and we put some extra cinnamon sticks and things like that in as well."

Timberline Landscaping in Colorado Springs, Colo., has been offering holiday lighting for over 20 years. Stephanie Early, the company's chief of strategy, says that it's the additional decorations that can take a lighting display to the next level.

"There is so much potential even outside the lighting realm with pieces of fun décor we can add," she says. "People do the big lit-up nutcrackers and large trees full of lights."

A COLORFUL CALENDAR. The festivities don't have to stop in January. Early and Wolfe say more clients are looking for colorful lighting displays to celebrate numerous holidays.

"We have a contract with the city of Manitou where we did a Halloween display for them and then transitioned that into Christmas later on," Early says. "We offer lighting for special events and weddings, too."

Wolfe attributes this color-changing craze to the advancements in lighting over the years. He adds that outdoor lighting is another popular service Wickenburg Landscapes provides and those customers tend to be more ambitious with their holiday lighting.

"A lot of our houses have really cool lighting systems and because of the new RGB bulbs, we've got customers who will take their lights and turn them red for Valentine's Day,

different colors for Memorial Day, Fourth of July and Labor Day. Plus, for Halloween, they turn them orange," he says. "And then for Christmas time they turn certain trees green and certain trees red. That way you have festive lighting year-round."

And for clients who don't want to pro-

gram the lighting themselves, Wickenburg is on the scene.

"We go in and grab their lights with Bluetooth and change them and then come back after the holiday and change them again," he says. "That's another service we provide."

SELLING THE SERVICE. Early says they, too, obtain most of their holiday lighting customers through their outdoor lighting service. "We find that they're well-aligned to be cross-sold," she says. "Because they're typically at our price point and you're not getting the people who don't have the disposable income. So, they see the value in not having to worry about it themselves."

Early says another reason clients appreciate their holiday lighting is they aren't beholden to the same display year after year.

"A big reason we've heard customers like our service, and what makes us a little different, is the lights are owned by us and we provide the design service and actually store the lights for the customer," she says. "So, they don't have to have space in their garage and worry about checking to make sure they are all working each year."

"And, if they decide they want to change their color or design year-to-year they aren't stuck in a singular look because they bought these lights and now need to continue to use them," Early adds.

Early says Timberline uses a special software when selling holiday lighting that allows clients to personalize their display.

"When a customer calls in, we are getting them set up with a salesperson who will go out to meet with them and customize the design for them," she says.

"The pricing varies by the size of the house, how much they're looking to have done, and so on. We take a look at what colors they want, do they want greenery, what they're budget is and really customize a design for them. That software allows us to add on options, too. The quote goes out automatically through the software, which is also very convenient."

And once those lights are up, the service doesn't stop there. Early says crews make several trips to holiday lighting customers throughout the season to ensure all lights are shining brightly.

"We have proactive checks and service that come along with the package," Early says. "Last year that paid off in a huge way... we had a major windstorm, and we went and fixed the lights and got things back up on rooflines and everything else...It really builds that trust and keeps those customers coming back."



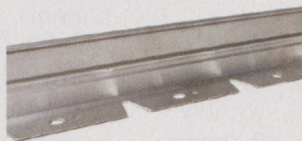
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Not only can holiday lighting be a lucrative add-on service in terms of recurring revenue, but it can also boost your company's brand.

Every year, Timberline Landscaping creates its Christmas Lights Guide for Colorado Springs, the community they serve.

Not only does this interactive Google Map mark homes Timberline has decorated, but also computerized and other festive displays and even local hot cocoa and coffee shops.

"We've been doing the light guide for 10 years now and it's submitted by people all over the city," says Stephanie Early, Timberline's chief of strategy. "They provide us the addresses and pictures of the property and we

code the map so you can tell if Timberline installed it, or if it's a computerized display, and it's a nice resource people can get on the site and use to tour the city. It's not just about us and the service: We want people to get out and use it and have a good time, even if it's to see lights we didn't put up."

The Christmas Lights Guide also features a Spotify playlist guests can play while touring the lights, a scavenger hunt for kids to do in the car and featured locations that are a must-see.

Early says all the time and energy that goes into the Lights Guide every year pays off tremendously.

"It helps get our name out there," she says of the Christmas Lights Guide. "That brand recognition is wonderful."

Early also notes that the mass amounts of people visiting the site helps boost the company's SEO position as well.

"The web traffic is a huge help with search engine optimization," she says.



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It's that attention and level of care that Early says makes customers devoted to Timberline.

"A huge thing for us is customer retention and the recurring revenue," she says. "Our renew rates with Christmas décor clients are phenomenal, so it's a way to build your recurring revenue. That trust we're developing year after year is great for us."

Wolfe says he won't take on a holiday decorating client who doesn't already buy another service from Wickenburg.

"It has to be an existing customer because it's such a small timeframe and we don't have time to learn about that customer," he says. "We want to be able to know how picky they are, what they like and don't like and all that."

Early says Timberline looks for new clients through several avenues.

"It's a combination of things," she says of selling the service. "We do let our existing customer base know through our market-

ing, and we market pretty heavily for new customers each year as well. We also do direct outreach, too."

CAREFUL CONSIDERATIONS. While holiday lighting can be a great source of recurring revenue, Wolfe says it's important to stick with your identity, no matter what add-on service you want to provide.

"You have to stay true to your brand," he says. "We're a high-end, specialty landscape company," he says. "We're not just going to throw in something really cheap. People ask us to do those things and we won't do it because it doesn't go with our brand. Classy and elegant is what we are."

Wolfe says staying true to the company's ethos is what sets their holiday lighting displays apart from the competition.

"We're not willing to make a dollar to go against our brand," he says.

Early adds that safety and training are also key to providing holiday lighting.


"The training and quality of lighting can vary a lot by the installer and provider," she says. "That's something we feel has set us apart because you can look and see the difference between a tree Timberline has wrapped and ones local competitors have done. We try to avoid that candy cane wrap of a tree. We want it to look like every limb is covered."

Before starting to provide this service, Early suggests companies do their research and secure the proper equipment.

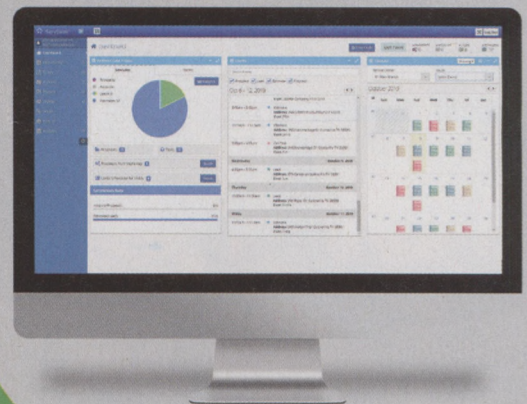
"Safety is a big concern and there's a lot to be aware of there with local regulations and OSHA," she says. "To get up on the roof, you have to have roof anchors in place...there is some specialized equipment needed. We've purchased quite a few bucket trucks to be able to get up to the heights we need and ensure we're working safely." **L&L**

The author is an assistant editor with Lawn & Landscape.

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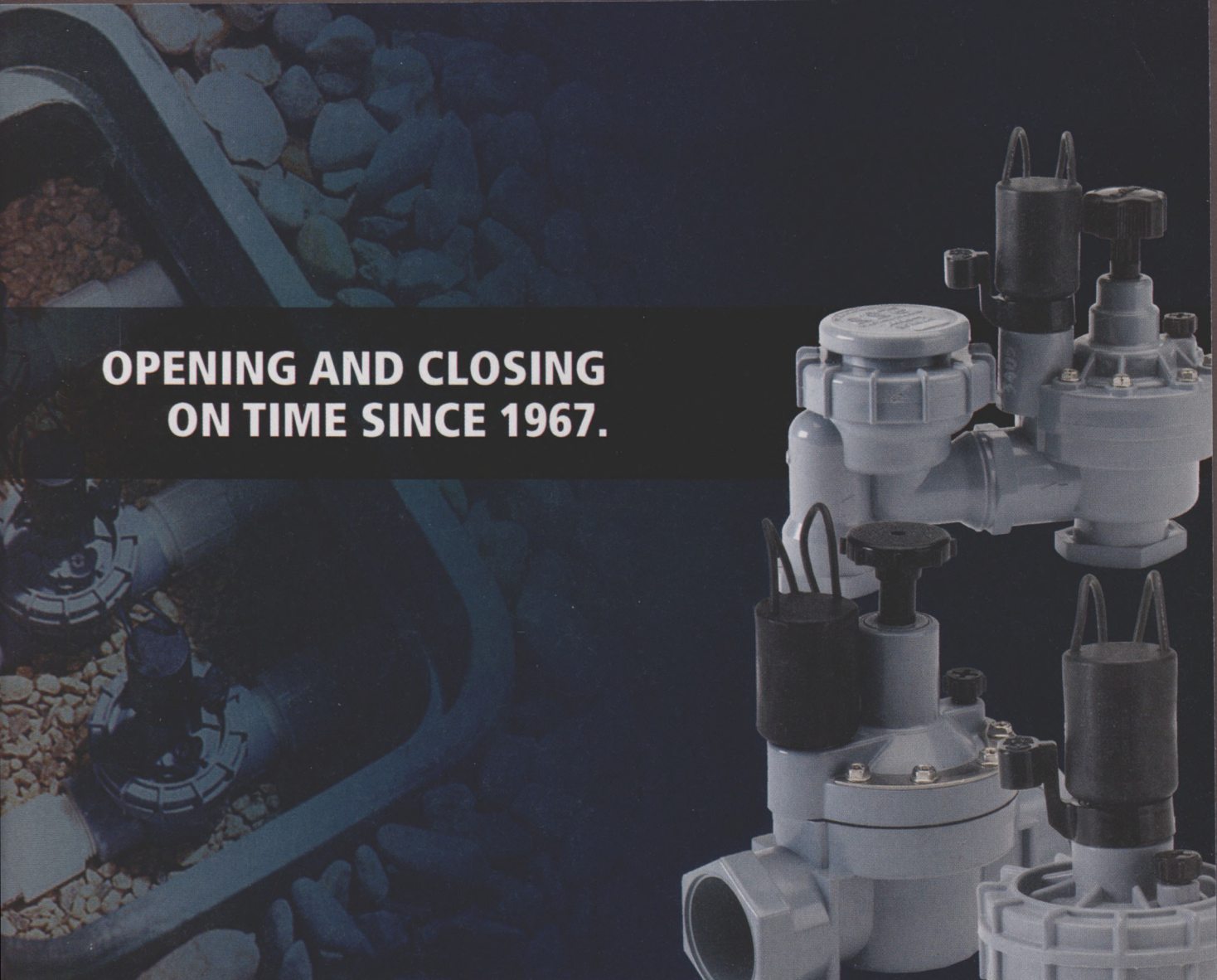
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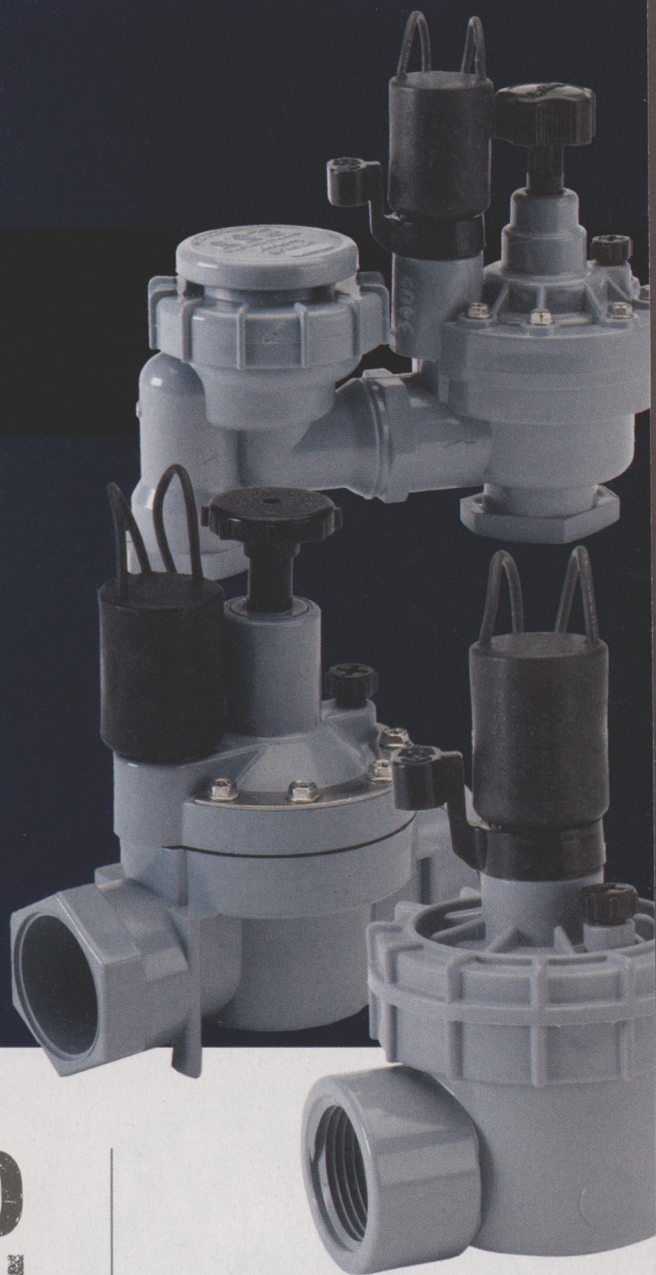
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BEHIND THE BOOTH

Career fairs can be a great opportunity for budding landscapers.

But what are employers looking for when finding their next employees?

By Jimmy Miller

IT WASN'T LONG AGO Kamsi Gerry-Ofor was on the other side of the tables at career fairs. She's now a landscape design sales associate at Live Green Landscapes in Maryland, but she remembers pacing gym floors thinking of ways to pitch herself to prospective employers.

"I remember walking through being super nervous and trying so hard to impress, but now as an employer, that's not even what I'm looking for," Gerry-Ofor says. "I'm not looking for the person with the highest GPA or someone who's here in a suit and tie."

Gerry-Ofor's first trip to the National Collegiate Landscape Competition was going to be in 2020 as a student competitor with Penn State. Instead, COVID-19 cancelled that event, so her initial NCLC experience was instead spent representing a company.

During the time she sat at the career fair, which precedes NCLC's competitive events during the week, Gerry-Ofor and Kevin Crawford, a Live Green assistant project manager, met with roughly 30 students. Of that bunch, they estimate that five stood out.

But why? What was it that those five students did that the other students didn't? During NCLC, company recruiters spoke about what they're looking for from behind the booth. It's not all about providing an impressive resume – it's ultimately about attitude and networking.

Networking can be a critical part of career fairs for students about to enter the workforce.





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Recruiters from landscape companies encourage students to ask all kinds of questions when visiting their booths.



A STRONG WHY. Ozzie Ortiz is relatively new to the green industry: He previously worked in the hospitality and food industries before becoming a recruiter at AAA Landscape. Ortiz remembers how staggering it was to realize just how many segments of the green industry someone can enter; there seemed like an unlimited number of choices.

And that's why it's so important to know your why, Ortiz says. Knowing what you might want to do in the green industry is great, as he says it's a good sign that you know your goals. But more critically, Ortiz wants to know why you're entering the industry. Someone can always go from maintenance to design/build, and those skills can eventually be taught. Passion, however, is an unteachable trait.

"It's about their attitude more than anything. Making sure that they're passionate about the industry, but also making sure they have that persona, that drive, that's really going to help on the people side of the industry. It's not always going to be just about working with plants," Ortiz says.

"A lot of the industry involves working with clients, working with people. I want them to articulate clearly why they chose this industry — I want a strong 'why.'"

Jackie Hales, the HR director at Brookstone Landscape & Design in Lynnwood, Washington, reminds students that they likely won't get their dream job right out of school. So, she urges students to know what they want to get out of their green-industry career.

"Where are you wanting to go in your career? What are you wanting to do?" Hales says. "A lot of times when you're graduating, you're not getting into that perfect job. We think that because we went to school and we got that degree that we should be able to get that job, but that's not how life works. We still have to climb the corporate ladder so to speak."

STAYING CONNECTED. Some of the work comes after the career fair itself, too. Hales says she's earned her last two jobs largely because of the networking she did as she advanced through her career.

Networking can be intimidating, or it might feel like forcing conversations with strangers. Hales says she once attended the NCLC career fair as a student herself, and though she didn't compete, her biggest regret comes from what followed the weeks after the event.

"I wish I would have done better at networking and staying in contact with some of the people that I had met at that competition," Hales says.

Hales recommends that once a student has built an initial connection with someone in the industry, they should start by sending a follow-up email every few months. Maybe those emails contain questions about the industry, or maybe they contain praise for some work they saw online.

Hales says students shouldn't always email looking for jobs, but they should stay in touch in other ways to show genuine interest in the contact and the contact's company. Eventually, just start emailing once or twice a year.

For Hales, she was able to email someone she met years prior letting them know she was looking for a job. The email wasn't poorly received, she says, because she had stayed in communication already.

"Stay in touch, because even if you have a good job. You never know if your company will go under or if you'll need to move or anything like that," Hales says.

“

IT'S ABOUT THEIR ATTITUDE MORE THAN ANYTHING. MAKING SURE THAT THEY'RE PASSIONATE ABOUT THE INDUSTRY, BUT ALSO MAKING SURE THEY HAVE THAT PERSONA, THAT DRIVE, THAT'S REALLY GOING TO HELP ON THE PEOPLE SIDE OF THE INDUSTRY. IT'S NOT ALWAYS GOING TO BE JUST ABOUT WORKING WITH PLANTS."

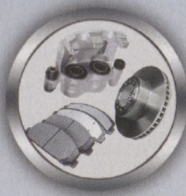
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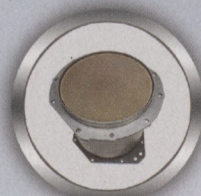
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IT GOES BOTH WAYS. Ortiz can always tell when a student checks out in a conversation at a career fair table — most often, he jokes, it's when he mentions that AAA Landscape is in Phoenix.

"For us, it's a little unique because once we say we're in Arizona, for some it can be a dealbreaker," he says. "If they show they want to work out west in more of an arid climate, then we can talk a little more."

So, the burden is on the companies to sell themselves to students, too. Crawford says Live Green strives to make career fair talks with students more conversational — he wants to see how they'll interact with you in a work setting, not a phony, overly professional setting.

"It doesn't need to be super proper," Crawford says. "That's something employers need to grasp and that's something students need to grasp."

And Gerry-Ofor says CEOs and team leaders should keep in mind that nobody is doing work for free.

Gerry-Ofor encourages companies to amplify their teams' voices, even if they've only been recently hired or seem less experienced than others. At her company, she sits at conference tables with seasoned industry veterans and believes she has an equal voice despite her being just two years removed from school.

"A lot of people really appreciate that. People want to know when you come in that you'll be listened to," she says.

Gerry-Ofor says many students came up at NCLC and asked whether they'd be

in the office or in the field, but she encourages students to ask questions that might more directly tell them if it's a good place to work long-term or not. Ask about work-life balance, she says. Ask about the team culture. Gerry-Ofor would even ask about vacation. She knows some won't like that, but this is "real life."

"You really want to know that on a Saturday morning, nobody's going to be calling you asking you to work," she says. "You want to know that after a few months of hard work, you can take a trip and nobody's going to be calling you asking about work." **L&L**

The author is an associate editor at Lawn & Landscape.



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EYE ON INNOVATION

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**Bryan Mours**, vice president of customer experience at Aspire Software

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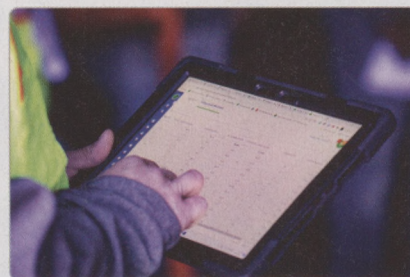
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# AN AVERAGE DAY

**Elizabeth Bonadonna**, president  
of Busy Beaver Lawn & Garden,  
in West Seneca, New York



Elizabeth Bonadonna, president of Busy Beaver Lawn & Garden, in West Seneca, New York, recently made an investment to make sure her free time was just that — free.

“I purchased a separate cell phone to use as my personal cell phone,” she says. “I turn the business phone on “do not disturb” from 6 p.m. to 7 a.m. to avoid phone calls/texts or the temptation to work. I also limit work conversations with my partners to wind down and relax.”

Interviewed by **Brian Horn**

## Here is Bonadonna's average day.

I am not a morning person, so most of the time I wake up, get ready and start my day. I've always chose extra sleep over other morning activities.

(Breakfast) varies day to day. Sometimes I eat hard-boiled eggs, egg and cheddar wraps or a bowl of cereal. If I am in a hurry, I will eat an egg and cheddar breakfast wrap on the go.

I have two locations: our retail center and our headquarters. The retail center is about 17 minutes away from home, and HQ is about 12 minutes. I typically put on Pandora and go with the shuffle option or toggle between the local radio stations.

I get in between 8-10 a.m. depending on morning appointments. When I get in, I usually check in with employees and see if they need my assistance or set them up for the day. I then go to my to-do list and start working on that.

I always start by recreating/organizing my to-do list. I like to start a new one, so it's clean and easy to follow. I also try to prioritize the order in which me or employees perform the tasks.

Lunch is between 12-2 p.m. I usually bring a lunch, which is typically food that we meal prepped for the week or dinner leftovers from the night. I purposely make extra to have leftovers for lunch. If I don't pack my own lunch, I will get a protein shake and a meal prep from 95 Nutrition, which is a local meal prep company.

I will do a mid-day update with office staff,

field crews and get an idea of how to plan for the next day.

When I leave depends on how much workload I have for that day or week. I typically leave between 5-7 p.m. Most of the time, my day does not end at this time. I either have an evening appointment or go for a workout.

I would say I have about one meeting a day, sometimes less than that since I try to keep meetings to a couple days a week to avoid booking too many meetings. I try to approach the meeting with an agenda or if I know the person(s) I am meeting with have a tendency to take longer, I say I only have X amount of minutes to meet so they know the meeting is capped.

I aim to go to bed between 10:30-11 p.m. I am a night owl so this is a struggle for me. I set the sleep schedule on my phone to remind me to wind down, which consists of disconnecting from technology/TV and anything stimulating. I take melatonin and sometimes do forms of meditation to relax my mind.

I enjoy sleeping in and moseying around on the weekends. I like to avoid time commitments on the weekend so I can feel refreshed and less stressed. I always go to the gym and enjoy the outdoors whenever I can. I do work on the weekends; however, it's becoming more minimal as we get better with managing our businesses. I will find myself checking emails and catching up on some office work if the week was very busy. I am getting better at letting things wait until Monday so I can avoid burnout. If it is something important, then I make sure it's taken care of. **L&L**



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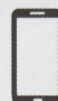
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