

LANDSCAPE PROFILE

A GOLD MEDALIST

Award-winning Chapel Valley Landscape Company of Woodbine, Md., continues to gather the accolades. Owner Landon Reeve thinks that's great but not as great as a satisfied client.

Ken Kuhajda, managing editor



Landon Reeve could probably wallpaper his entire office with awards earned by his Chapel Valley Landscape Company.

Those walls do support plaques and certificates earned since the company's birth in 1968. Chapel Valley is that good.

Those in the industry realize Chapel Valley is one of the finest landscaping companies in the Eastern United States.

Awards are more than wallpaper, says company owner Reeve, but he doesn't enter competition for himself. He does it for the clients.

"I don't count them," he says, genuine modesty surfacing. "When we feel we have quality jobs, we enter them, not only for the recognition of the employees and our company—more for the recognition of the client."

Some of those clients? Mobil Oil headquarters, Johns Hopkins Hospital, Baltimore Hyatt, Martin Marietta headquarters, and a wheelbarrow-full of others.

Baltimore, Washington D.C., or northern Virginia, you'll find Chapel Valley Landscape crews improving the landscape.

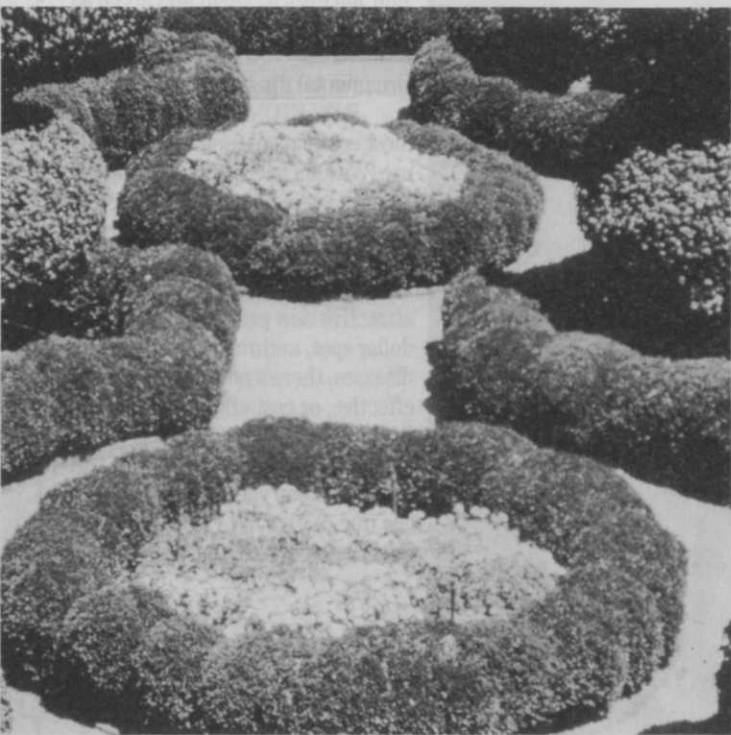
37 acres

If you're heading west of Baltimore and you're hungry, it's a good idea to stop on Baltimore's western fringe. If you continue out I-70 West, you



Three of Chapel Valley Landscaping Company's showcase award-winners, counterclockwise from top: a condominium project in Bethesda, Md. that features a courtyard over the top of a parking garage; Duke Street Metro Office Building, a leased office building; and Martin/Marietta Corporate Headquarters in Bethesda.

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Two flower beds set on white gravel make a striking setting.



Landon Reeve, the brains behind the success of Chapel Valley Landscaping.

won't find much.

Baltimore doesn't have many suburbs that way.

For 20 miles along I-70, cows and silos dominate the landscape. It's farm country, it's serene.

On a 37-acre plot of land amid this tranquility sits Chapel Valley.

Six acres are developed; the nursery takes up 10.

That gives 100 or so peak-season employees room to roam. Reeve gives them the figurative room. "In this industry, people are number one in importance. If you have the right people, you can do anything," he says. "I can buy 50 trucks tomorrow but couldn't buy 50 good employees."

Most Chapel Valley field people work four 10-hour days. Reeve pays them well. He gets results.

"Our staff is excellent," he says. Unemployment is an obscure two to three percent in the Baltimore-Washington area. Reeve admits he can't fill all his positions. But he's been lucky over the last 17 years. "In our industry, the number one problem, as always, is people," he says.

A first-class area

Although there's a manpower shortage in the Baltimore-

Washington area, there's no shortage of development.

Commercial construction, Chapel Valley's niche, runs unabated. Competition between Baltimore and Washington for that corporate dollar is at an all-time high.

Similarly, competition among landscape firms is heavy. Chapel Valley has changed to keep pace.

In the last year-and-a-half, Chapel Valley has computerized

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—Reeve

its buying, billing, and marketing functions.

The landscape installation division, the company's strength, has been streamlined. Landscape manager Dan Tamminga supervises two regional managers, each with his own territory.

Each manager oversees specific

projects, maintaining close contact with field foremen. Reeve says the structure has worked, providing efficient construction methods. Landscape workers total 35, with five crews of six.

Another change is the success of the maintenance department, formed just five years ago.

Maintenance manager Rich Grigalus oversees eight crews and 27 employees.

The workers further their educations by attending horticulture training seminars. Five have pesticide licenses.

Chapel Valley has maintenance field offices in Bethesda, Md., and northern Virginia. The company makes an effort to hire those in the local work force.

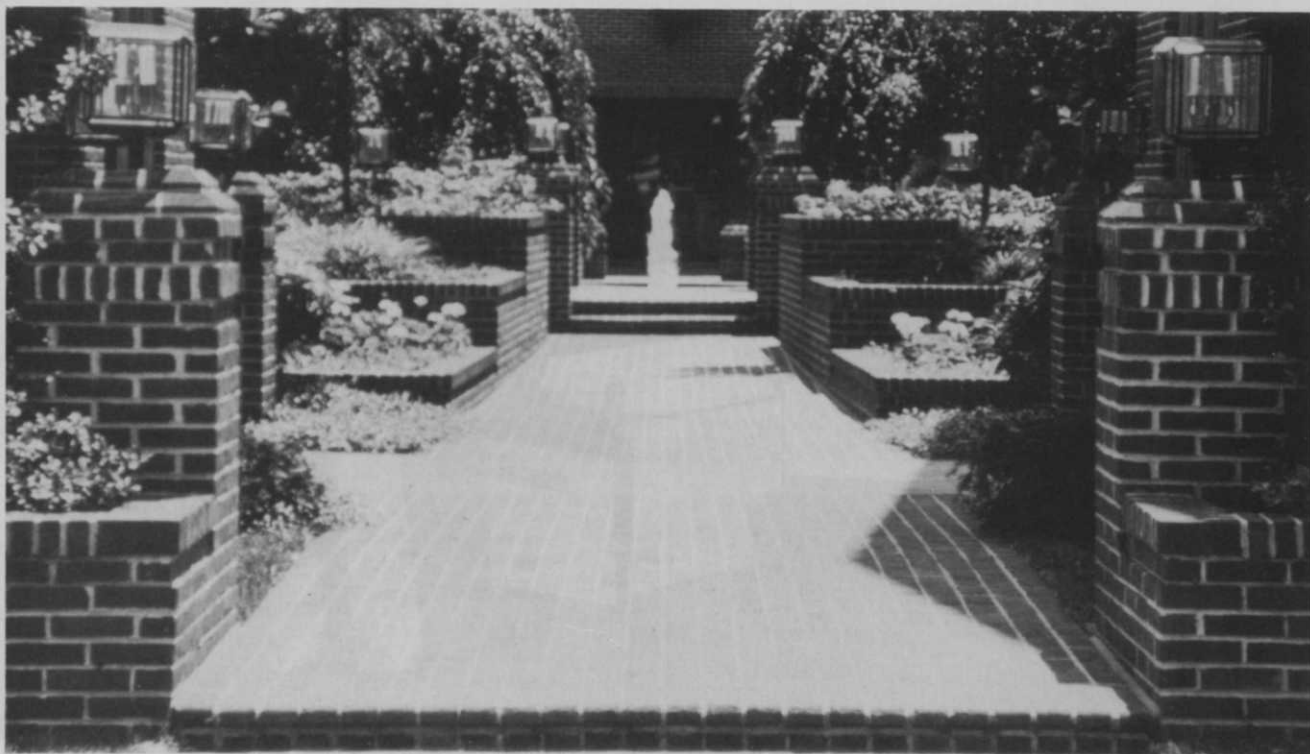
Another asset is a growing landscape design department that now includes five landscape architects.

Just a day off

When the pieces of Chapel Valley interlock, gross revenues total almost \$5 million. Back in 1968, Landon Reeve only wanted to work less than a seven-day week. He didn't dream of heading a multi-million dollar corporation.

"We've become a little larger than

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A harmonious water fountain installed on the Duke Street project in Alexandria, Va.

I thought we would," he says. "My goal has always been to do a quality job and let the result of that dictate the size we will be. I felt we could grow, but we didn't sit down and say we would be this size by this date."

His partnership in a lawn and garden center lasted from 1964-67 ("we struggled," he recalls), but working every day from March 1 to July 4 left the University of Maryland grad little time for his wife Janet, who was expecting their second child.

(Daughter Deonne, 19, is now a sophomore at Western Maryland College while son James is a junior at Blue Ridge School in Dyke, Va.)

They solved their problem by starting their own business on a plot of land purchased in 1967.

A commercial business

Little Chapel Valley, officially seeded in 1968, prospered from day one. Landon and Janet still worked six to seven days in the early years until growth and key hirings made possible more relaxing five-day weeks.

Chapel Valley started in both residential and commercial landscaping but has made an intentional turn toward commercial.

"Ten years ago we did as much residential as commercial," says Reeve. The switch, he says, allowed the

company to reach a "comfort level."

"We felt our production could be a little better with the commercial end. We get a better return on our dollar," he says.

"We felt you couldn't serve both with the same attitude and same people. Residential is a much more emotional experience while commercial is much more objective."

Reeve feels his company—with its large-equipment inventory—is more effectively geared toward the less labor-intensive commercial construction end. "We really felt we weren't serving the residential customer properly," he says. "We still do a certain amount of residential, generally large residential projects."

Reeve: a support person

Commercial landscaping, maintenance, marketing, quality control—Chapel Valley's services are prototypical of a successful firm.

Reeve touches all areas, both directly and indirectly, in the form of a support employee. "I spend a lot of time working with the four managers, working to help them achieve their goals. Since I am a horticulturalist I might accompany the sales people to a presentation."

At other times, Reeve thinks

about tomorrow, not today. "I'm spending more and more time doing forecasting and planning—that is, what are we going to do next year," he says.

He's also the PR man. "I'm involved with ALCA (he's immediate past president of the Associated Landscape Contractors of America/Landscape Maintenance Division) and other associations. As a person I feel I have an obligation to try and project our company in a positive way to both the industry and the public," he says.

One of his PR tools is a slick, full-color brochure titled "Landscape." It's published quarterly.

The marketing tool showcases Chapel Valley accounts, explains company philosophy, and introduces and reintroduces company employees.

Employees Tom Tait (Baltimore marketing manager), Stewart Rom (landscape architect), and Peter Koeppen (marketing representative) collaborated on the editorial material while Koeppen and Reeve handled photography.

Group participation. Teamwork. A blending of various talents into one coherent whole. Satisfied clients. That's why Chapel Valley has enough awards to wallpaper its office. **WT&T**