

## LANDSCAPE PROFILE

# IN THE GREEN

WEEDS, TREES & TURF's search for the top money-making landscaping companies in the nation turns up some interesting numbers

by Jeff Sobol, assistant editor

**B**y a landslide, the largest landscape contractor in the nation is Environmental Industries, Inc., of Calabasas, Calif.

Environmental Industries is involved in every facet of landscape contracting, but mostly in larger and more complex commercial, industrial and public jobs.

According to Burton Sperber of Environmental, the company pulls in gross revenues of around \$2 million each week. That's as much as some of the companies in WEEDS, TREES & TURF's 1986 Top 50 make in a year.

Sperber says the 38-year-old company achieved its present size by doing a quality job, and doing it quickly.

One of Environmental's closest competitors for top money-making honors, The Brickman Group, declined to participate in this year's survey.

The next closest contractor is DeLaurentis Landscaping, Inc., of Mamaroneck, N.Y., which expected gross revenues totaling \$13 million. Rounding out the \$10 million-plus club are (sales in millions in parentheses): Vidosh Brothers, Sterling Hts., Mich. (\$12.5); Davis Landscape Contractors, Inc., Harrisburg, Pa. (\$10); The Bruce Company of Wisconsin, Inc., Middleton, Wis. (\$10); and Lancaster Landscapes, Arlington, Va. (\$10).

Interestingly, of those, only Environmental Industries operates in a warm weather area. This trend holds true for the remainder of the Top 50 as well. Nearly twice as many this year come from cooler weather areas.

It should be noted, however, that four of last year's top 10 companies did not participate in the survey this year. Of those, three were from warm weather areas.

### On the average

WT&T's Top 50 grossed approximately \$337,568,000 in 1986,

an average of about \$6.4 million per company (without Environmental Industries' \$104 million, the average is closer to \$4.6 million per company).

The companies averaged 2.2 branches, with 14 companies working out of a main office only. During peak season, Top 50 companies employed 8,363 people, or 161 per company, and 5,157 year round, an average of 99 per company.

Design and construction jobs totaled 13,340, an average of 272 per company. Top 50 companies also did 5,488 maintenance jobs in 1986, 110 per company. (EDITOR'S NOTE: figures for design/construction jobs were not available for three companies; for maintenance contracts, two companies. Environmental Industries figures were not yet compiled for either category. Averages were calculated using only those companies that could provide those numbers).

The following is a list of companies which allowed WT&T to use information provided in their surveys (branch offices are in addition to main offices):

**The Bruce Co. of Wisconsin, Inc.**, Middleton, Wis., made the \$10 million club on 400 design/construction jobs and 36 maintenance contracts. From one branch office, the company sends out 350 employees peak season and 200 year-round.

**Cagwin & Dorward**, Novato, Calif., placed 8th this year on \$9.3 million in gross revenues from 176 design/construction jobs and 220 maintenance contracts. The company has five branches, and employs 180 peak season, and 150 year-round.

**Clark-Morrell, Inc.**, Lithonia, Ga., turned 125 design/construction jobs and 60 maintenance contracts into revenues totaling \$5.2 million. Out of a main office, the company sends 115 employees peak, and 90 year-round.

**Contra Costa Landscaping, Inc.**, Martinez, Calif., grossed \$2.8 million in 1986 from 15 design/construction jobs. Figures for maintenance contracts were

unavailable. With two branches, the company employs 55 peak and 40 year-round.

**Clarence Davids & Sons, Inc.**, Blue Island, Ill., did 750 design/construction jobs and 125 maintenance contracts en route to \$3.5 million in revenues. The company employs 120 peak and 30 year-round while operating one branch office.

### DeLaurentis Construction Co.

Mamaroneck, N.Y., saw revenues more than double from last year, placing it second this year with \$13 million on the strength of just 40 design/construction jobs. The company has no maintenance contracts. With one branch office, employees number 120 peak and 40 year-round.

**East Side Nursing, Inc.**, Groveport, Ohio, joins the Top 50 with revenues of \$4 million from 3,000 design/construction jobs and 100 maintenance contracts. Operating out of one main office, the company employs 150 peak and 25 year-round.

**Environmental Industries, Inc.**, Calabasas, Calif., is this year's top entry, grossing \$104 million in 1986. Its 2,000 employees work out of 20 offices.

**Greathouse Landscape Co., Inc.**, Nashville, Tenn., remained in the Top 50 with \$3 million in revenues from 285 design/construction jobs and 82 maintenance contracts. Its 65 employees peak and 51 year-round work out of one main office.

**Greenleaves**, Chamblee, Ga., grossed \$4.8 million in 1986 from 34 design/construction jobs and 86 maintenance contracts. Year-round, Greenleaves employs 105, and 150-170 during peak season. The company operates three branch offices.

**Greeno, Inc.**, Concord, Mass., grossed \$3.4 million on 45 design/construction jobs. Its 15 year-round and 75 peak season employees work from one branch office.

**Greentree, Inc.**, Stone Mountain, Ga., turned 400 maintenance contracts into \$4.7 million gross. From three branch offices, the company sends out 140 employees peak, 90 year-round.

**Ground Control Landscaping, Inc.**, Orlando, Fla., grossed \$4.3 million from 15 design-construction jobs and 75 maintenance contracts. From one main office they send 90 year-round and 100 peak season employees.

**The Ground Crew, Inc.**, Arlington, Tex., grossed \$3 million from 48 design/construction jobs and 350 maintenance contracts. Its 120 peak and 28 year-round employees work out of three branch offices.

**Heyser Landscaping, Inc.**, had \$5.9 million revenues from 107 design/construction jobs and 100 maintenance contracts. During peak season, the company adds 100 employees to its 65 year-round staffers, while operating one branch office.

**Hillenmeyer's**, Lexington, Ky., operates two branches while employing

## LANDSCAPE PROFILE

150 peak and 100 year-round. Its \$3.5 million in revenues came from 400 design/construction jobs and 40 maintenance contracts.

**Ireland-Gannon Associates, Inc.**, East Norwich, N.Y., grossed \$3.5 million from 120 design/construction jobs. Its 25-employee staff grows to 50-60 during peak season. The company has one branch office.

**JKB Landscape, Inc.**, Aurora, Colo., turned 35 maintenance contracts and 20 design/construction jobs into revenues of \$2.8 million in 1986. Its 30 year-round and 70 peak season employees work from one main office.

**Johnson Hydro Seeding Corp.**, Rockville, Md., grossed nearly \$5.3 million from 200 design/construction jobs. One hundred and twenty-four peak season and 31 year-round employees work from four branch offices.

**Allen Keesen Landscape, Inc.**, Denver, Colo., raked in \$3 million from 185 maintenance contracts and 40 design/construction jobs. With one branch office, the company maintains a year-round staff numbering 35-40, which increases to 100 peak season.

**LMS Landscape, Inc.**, Dallas, Tex., grossed \$2.2 million on 150 maintenance contracts and 100 design/construction contracts. From one main office, the company sends out 40-50 staffers year-round, 90-100 peak season.

**Lancaster Landscapes, Inc.**, Arlington, Va., joined the \$10 million-plus club with 275 maintenance contracts and five design/construction jobs. Its 400 peak season and 250 year-round employees work out of nine branch offices.

**Larchwood Construction Corp.**, Holtsville, N.Y., grossed \$4 million from 30 design/construction jobs and 21 maintenance contracts. With one branch office, it employs 15-17 year-round and 70 peak season.

**Las Colinas Landscape Services, Inc.**, Irving, Tx, finishes out the top 10 with \$8.4 million in revenues from 200 maintenance contracts and 50 design/construction jobs. The company's 180 year-round and 250 peak season employees work out of one main office.

**Lied's Nursery Co., Inc.**, Sussex, Wis., grossed \$4.8 million through the work of a 35-person year-round staff, and 100 peak season. The company operates two branch offices. Accurate figures were not available for maintenance and design/construction jobs.

**McDugald-Steele**, Houston, Tex., with \$2.9 million in revenues did 120 design/construction jobs in 1986, along with having 48 maintenance contracts. The company's 30 year-round and 40 peak season employees work out of one branch office.

**Milford Landscape & Maintenance**, Milford, Conn., grossed \$3.5 million on 34 design/construction jobs and 45 maintenance contracts. Forty-five year round and 100 peak season employees

work out of one main office.

**W.E. Mundy Landscape Contractors**, Aurora, Ill., grossed \$2.8 million on a 50-50 split of 100 maintenance and design/construction jobs. With one branch office, the company carries 80 employees peak season, and pares down to 15 year-round.

**North Haven Gardens**, Dallas, Tex., completed more than 3,000 design/construction jobs, along with having 260 maintenance contracts, earning the company \$3.8 million in gross revenues for 1986. The company has two branches, 110 employees peak season and 85 year-round.

**Oak Brook Landscape Co.**, Oak Brook, Ill., brought in \$3.5 million on 85 maintenance contracts and 35 design/construction jobs. Twenty-one year round and 110 peak season employees work out of four branches.

**Oyler Bros. Company**, Orlando, Fla., placed ninth with revenues of \$8.5 million from 235 maintenance contracts and 125 design/construction contracts. The company employs 225 year round and 300 peak season while operating four branch offices.

**Reinhold Landscape, Inc.**, Detroit, Mich., enters the Top 50 with revenues of \$4 million from 75 maintenance contracts and 15 design/construction jobs. From one branch office, the company employs 40 year-round and 100 peak season staffers.

**SaBell's, Inc.**, Englewood, Colo., placed 10th last year, but this year moved up to 7th with \$9.5 million in revenues, mostly from 350 design/construction jobs. The company's 60 year-round and 300 peak season employees also worked on 40 maintenance contracts while operating two branch offices.

**Alfred L. Simpson & Co., Inc.**, Atlanta, Ga., operated one branch office while employing a staff of 150 peak season, 100 year round. Its \$5 million in revenues

came from 60 maintenance contracts and 50 design/construction jobs.

**R.B. Stout, Inc.**, Akron, Ohio, brought in revenues of \$3.9 million from 350 maintenance contracts and 100-150 design/construction contracts. The company carries just five employees year-round, but increases the staff to 115-135 peak season.

**Vidosh Brothers**, Sterling Hts., Mich., ranked a close third this year on \$12.5 million in revenues. The company did 125 design/construction jobs and had 50 maintenance contracts in 1986. Its 80 year-round and 185 peak season employees work out of two branch offices.

**White Oak Landscape Co., Inc.**, Marietta, Ga., finished 250 design construction jobs and had 26 maintenance contracts, giving it \$2.5 million in gross revenues. A main office supports 50 year-round and 78 peak season employees.

**EDITOR'S NOTE:** In order for this survey to be as comprehensive as possible, the editors need your assistance. Unfortunately, it's tough to reach all 12,000 of you landscape contractors with the survey. Obviously, it is much easier for you to reach us. So, if your gross revenues exceed \$2 million for 1987 and you would like to be a part of next year's survey, please send us a business card with the company name, address and a contact person to whom we can send the survey. If you were left off of this year's survey, we're sorry. We are the first magazine or organization to do this sort of project. Please bear with us as our "Top 50" survey goes through its growing pains.

# WT&T

# TOP 50

for 1986 selling season

**AAA Lawn Industries**  
Tucker, GA

**The Bruce Company**  
Racine, WI

**Cagwin & Dorward**  
Novato, CA

**Chapel Valley Landscape**

**Woodbine, MD**

**Clark-Morrell**  
Lithonia, GA

**Contra Costa Landscaping**  
Martinez, CA

**Clarence Davids & Sons**  
Blue Island, IL

*TOP 50 continued on page 44*

## LANDSCAPE PROFILE

Davis Landscaping Contractors Harrisburg, PA	The Ground Crew Arlington, TX	Lancaster Landscapes, Inc. Arlington, VA
DeAngelis Landscape Woodhaven, MI	Edmund M. Hayden Landscape Woodstock, IL	Larchwood Construction Corp. Holtsville, NY
DeLaurentis Construction Co. Mamaroneck, NY	Heyser Landscaping Norristown, PA	Las Colinas Landscape Services, Inc. Irving, TX
East Side Nursery Groveport, OH	Hillenmeyer's Lexington, KY	Lied's Nursery Co. Sussex, WI
Environmental Industries Calabasas, CA	Industrial Landscape Services San Jose, CA	McDugald-Steele Associates Houston, TX
Greathouse Landscaping Co. Nashville, TN	Ireland-Gannon Associates East Norwich, NY	Milford Landscaping & Maintenance Milford, CT
Green Carpet Landscape Worchester, MA	JKB Landscape, Inc. Aurora, CO	W.E. Mundy Landscape Contracting Aurora, IL
Greanleaves Chamblee, GA	Johnson Hydro Seeding Corp. Rockville, MD 20850	North Haven Gardens Dallas, TX
Greeno Inc. Concord, MA	Allen Keesen Landscape Denver, CO	Oak Brook Landscaping Oak Brook, IL
Greentree, Inc. Stone Mountain, GA	L&L Maintenance Santa Clara, CA	Oyler Bros. Co. Orlando, FL
Ground Control Landscape, Inc. Orlando, FL	LMS Landscape Inc. Dallas, TX	Plant Control Corp. Irvine, CA

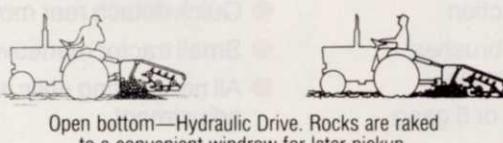


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Larchwood Construction Corp.  
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Las Colinas Landscape Services,  
Inc.  
Irving, TX

Lied's Nursery Co.  
Sussex, WI

McDugald-Steele Associates  
Houston, TX

Milford Landscaping &  
Maintenance  
Milford, CT

W.E. Mundy Landscape  
Contracting  
Aurora, IL

North Haven Gardens  
Dallas, TX

Oak Brook Landscaping  
Oak Brook, IL

Oyler Bros. Co.  
Orlando, FL

Plant Control Corp.  
Irvine, CA

Reinhold Landscape, Inc.  
Detroit, MI

Ruppert Landscaping  
Ashton, MD

SaBell's Inc.  
Lakewood, CO

Alfred L. Simpson & Co.  
Atlanta, GA

SKB Lawn Inc.  
Clarkston, GA

R.B. Stout  
Akron, OH

Suburban Landscape Assoc.  
Davenport, IA

Torre & Bruglio Landscape  
Contracting  
Mount Clemens, MI

Vidosh Brothers  
Sterling Hts., MI

White Oak Landscaping  
Marietta, GA

## LANDSCAPE PROFILE

# ALL-PRO LANDSCAPERS

The Ruppert Landscape Co. maintains an impressive client list with a 'mission' to be the best.

by Heide Aungst, associate editor

**I**t's easy to drive right past Ruppert Landscape Co.

The quaint red-brick house, which sits off an Ashton, Md., road, doesn't look like an office. It's just another house in the neighborhood.

But the house's history gives it an appeal the surrounding homes don't share.

Baseball Hall-of-Famer Sam Rice of the Washington Senators once lived there. And, if there was such a thing as a landscape Hall of Fame, the Rupperts would probably be inducted.

The Ruppert brothers, Craig 31, and Chris 33, moved their small business to Rice Manor in 1980. At that time they bought just two acres of the land surrounding the home. Today, the company owns almost 10 acres.

Back then, the company made \$440,000. This year the company will do about \$4 million in business.

They've come a long way from the humble beginnings of mowing neighborhood lawns in Chevy Chase, Md., for a few extra bucks. Their list of clientele includes the Saudi Arabian embassy and Vice President George Bush's home in Washington, D.C.

They're award winners, as well. The Rupperts won the Landscape Contractors Association of America's Metropolitan Washington award in 1984 for the Blair Complex, an apartment building.

### Billers from the start

Craig started the company in 1971 at 18. Chris joined him the next year. One thing that set the Ruppert brothers apart from other neighborhood kids is that they would bill their customers, like a professional business.

In 1972 they hired a friend's kid brother, age 12, to help with the lawn mowing. Chris Davitt, now 26, has become a key decision-maker in the business.

Craig holds the title of president; Chris Ruppert is director of landscape; and Davitt is director of landscape management.

The three have never let their young ages deter them. In fact, the spirit of youth has perhaps

The "Wetland" project required restoring marshlands destroyed when a tunnel was built. The Ruppert Landscape Company won an award for the project shown here in before and after photos.



The Ruppert brain trust: Chris Ruppert (left), Chris Davitt (center) and Craig Ruppert. The trio began their turf career mowing lawns in Chevy Chase, Md.



contributed to their success.

Take Ruppert's 1985 "Wetlands" project. Other landscape companies in the intensely competitive D.C./Baltimore market turned up their noses at the idea of restoring the marshlands which had been destroyed when the Baltimore Tunnel was built.

The trick was to create a wildlife environment in the tidal waters of Baltimore Harbor.

But the Rupperts, with no knowledge of aquatic plants, said they'd try.

They bought a boat and 25 life-jackets. Wading through mud between high and low tides, the daring company planted 650,000 bare root tubers (plants such as cattails) over 40 acres.

"There's been the attitude here which has prevailed since the beginning that they've never said they can't do a job," says Pat Ruppert, special projects coordinator. That's an attitude Pat had to learn when she married Craig five years ago. "There sure are a lot of dreamers here," she says.

Those dreams should lead to the opening of an office at a second site soon and possibly expanding to a national company someday.

Already, with close to a hundred employees, they're outgrowing the Rice Manor office.

Handling that many employees is something the three admit they didn't do well at first. As long as crews were working hard, it didn't matter if they were happy.

#### Employee rewards

"We used to get in the truck and curse the boss, who happened to be the Rupperts," Davitt says laughingly.

"Our biggest challenge is people," says Craig. "And we can't grow without people. Keeping everyone happy and productive, that's something we do well."

"We do it well," Chris Ruppert chimes in, "but it's still our biggest challenge."

To meet that challenge, they now give three annual awards for employee achievement. They hold monthly staff meetings, regular training seminars, and a competitive field day including a family cook-out.

They've begun an employee profit-sharing program. On top of that, the Rupperts know every worker personally, and publish "The Ruppert Report," a newsletter printed three times yearly to keep employees informed on projects and



**The Rupperts purchased current home Rice Manor along with two acres of land in 1980. Today the company owns 10 adjacent acres.**

company growth.

As with most companies, financial management is as important as personnel management. Although the company has printed financial statements since '72, they've learned a lot by trial and error.

"You name it, we've done it wrong," says Craig.

**Their list of clientele includes the Saudi Arabian embassy and Vice President George Bush's home in Washington, D.C.**

"There were several different times we didn't plan for the growth," Davitt explains.

"The key is not that you make mistakes, but that you learn from them," Chris Ruppert adds.

Running the company has been an education for the brothers.

Craig doesn't have a college degree. Chris has an associate's degree in business. Chris Davitt stopped short of receiving a bachelor's in business.

They learned about plant materials in the field and at seminars. Sometimes, the instructions on a fertilizer bag served as a teaching tool.

Trade associations and using the local extension agent helped the three

make it through some projects. Hiring qualified workers has helped, too.

Many of the Rupperts' managers are educated in related areas, such as horticulture.

In fact, the Rupperts have established a relationship with the University of Mississippi where students work on a co-op basis and then have the opportunity for a full-time position after graduation. They also plan to recruit from other universities.

#### More installation

But some things won't change as the company grows, the Rupperts emphasize.

For one thing, they will continue to concentrate on landscape installation and management. Landscape design or growing their own plant materials might look promising to some companies, but the Rupperts are wary about spreading themselves too thin.

They will still take on jobs which other companies might refuse.

The company's philosophy, which they call "The Ruppert Mission," is framed in almost every office at Rice Manor. The goal: to be aggressive, efficient and profitable.

"I have to read it every other day," Craig says.

One thing he doesn't need to be reminded of is the company's multi-million dollar figures. With those in hand, the three partners can breathe easily at the end of each day.

Mission accomplished. **WT&T**

## LANDSCAPE PROFILE

# LANDSCAPING FOR THE RICH AND FAMOUS

Tree Land Nurseries in West Palm Beach makes money and wins awards with the best of them. The secret? The trust its clients have for Tree Land.

The green in West Palm Beach, Fla., is not just in the turf and trees.

In an area where money is more abundant than palm trees, Tree Land Nurseries has tapped into the profitable market.

If you drive through the wealthy Palm Beach area, chances are that several of the multi-million dollar mansions you pass are landscaped by Tree Land.

Drive up the southeast coast of Florida, stop to buy a Whopper, and that Burger King probably was landscaped by Tree Land.

And when the Olympic swimming trials take place at Mission Bay in Boca Raton, Tree Land vice-president Raworth Wall will be able to watch in peace: another million-dollar-plus "mission

accomplished."

Tree Land, with accounts from Key West to Orlando, is one of the largest landscape firms in the state. And Wall "couldn't venture a guess" at how many awards the company has won in its 13 years.

"We believe in building a ground base of trust and good relationship with a large company," Wall says. "Most importantly, we make sure we meet deadlines for the C.O. (certificate of occupancy)."

### A college-professor look

Wall, a gray-bearded Englishman, looks more like a pipe-smoking professor than a landscape contractor. Educated in horticulture and landscape architecture at the universities of Essex and Cambridge, Wall fell in love with the subtropical

climate in West Palm Beach and settled there.

One thing he loves about Florida is the "instant" landscaping. It's not uncommon for Tree Land to move large trees in full flower at any time of the year. The biggest is a 45-ton ficus tree at Mission Bay, just one of some 4,000 trees moved during that project.

### Condos dropping off

The southern landscape market differs from northern primarily in the type of buildings being designed.

Wall says the trend in the Florida building market is total care facilities and rental properties.

The condo market is dropping off. People seem more interested in single-family, self-contained homes, with landscape management provided through an association.

"I'm concerned about the overbuilding of office buildings," he says. "That market is really overbuilt. The price per square foot is going down. We can pretty much negotiate our own terms."

Another difference between the two markets is that Florida landscapers may lose control over what type of trees dot the landscape. A surge in Florida's population has forced the Native Plant Society and the Southern Florida Water Management District to issue a proclamation that all state projects must be landscaped with native trees, since they use less water.

The groups particularly push using the state tree, sabal palm, to maintain the tropical Florida look while conserving water.

"I think a good combination of native and exotic trees should be used...a good mix of pines, palms and flowering trees to add and enhance color," Wall says.

### Cutthroat competition

Tree Land employs about 150 people. Wall says the pride and competition among foremen is so strong that he rarely sends two out on the same job.

When projects include Jack Nicklaus' home in Lost Tree, the Palm Beach Polo Club in Wellington (royal host to Prince Charles and Princess Diana when they visited), or a small streetside park on luxurious Worth Avenue, the

Tree Land won a design/build Florida state landscape award for the Radice Corporate Center.



cutthroat competition is understandable.

"It's fun doing those projects because they have the money to do it the right way," Wall says, grinning at the thought of a homeowner spending \$100,000 on landscape installation. "It gives the foreman a great sense of accomplishment."

The company does no maintenance work. But Wall will prepare a fertilizer and spray program for customers who don't know the proper procedure.

"I get upset when an owner invests three-quarters of a million dollars on a project and I drive by six months later and it's brown," Wall sighs. "It's a real shame."

#### Future plans

Tree Land's nursery carries about \$5 million in inventory. The company's future plans include further specializing in plant materials, with an emphasis on more salt-tolerant plants for oceanfront landscapes.

Down the road Tree Land also plans expanded mechanization. The company already boasts more than 100 pieces of equipment, including

hydraulic cranes, front-end loaders and water trucks. The company has purchased its own service truck.

The company recently opened its second landscape contracting office in Orlando.

The design and contract divisions rarely work together on a job. When they do, the sister divisions often

create masterpieces, like the Radice Corporate Center.

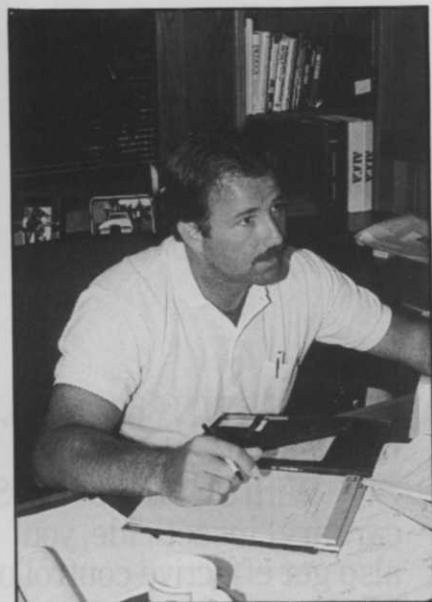
Of course, million dollar figures can be a real motivator to a company. But, when you can landscape for some of the world's richest people, it would just be boring to work any place else.

—Heide Aungst



Landscaping luxurious Palm Beach homes is all in a day's work.

## BEST IN THE NORTHWEST?



Rich Akerman, president of Northwest Landscape Industries, used to weigh 267 pounds during his college football days. He's down to a svelte 205 now.

Northwest Landscape Industries is enjoying success in 'The Silicon Forest' by keeping many high-tech clients 'in the chips.'

**W**hen you look for quality in the landscape industry, look to the Pacific Northwest, home of Northwest Landscape Industries.

A trendsetter from its birth 15 years ago, Northwest remains one of the nation's finest large-scale operations, thanks to a skilled work force and management with vision.

General manager Jim Wathey and president Rich Akerman became partners 14 years ago and have watched the operations grow with vigor each year. Today, revenues total \$6 million.

"Our overall goal for this company is to be in the \$10 to \$14

million range," says Akerman. "We don't want to get too big because it's fun now. We've gone through hard growth that has wiped some young kids out. Bigger is not always better."

Northwest has main offices in Tigard, Ore., a Portland suburb, and Seattle, Wash., and smaller offices in Portland and nearby Beaverton.

High-tech companies dominate the Portland area (Akerman calls it "The Silicon Forest").

"Here in the Northwest, we have something a lot of people don't realize—water," says Akerman, a native of California's arid San

## LANDSCAPE PROFILE



Northwest Landscape Industries maintains the Tektronics campus located along Rte. 217 in south Portland, an area teeming with high-tech operations.



Fernando Valley region. Northwest revenues come from two sources: landscape construction and industrial landscape maintenance.

### A unique business

Northwest's growth is a result of attention to the little things.

Like using only reel mowers. "We set the trend," Akerman says, noting that just about everyone else in Portland also uses reels. Northwest has invested in Ransomes 70-inch triplex and Toro 58- and 70-inch triplex mowers.

Akerman makes cold calls on clients to find out how his crews are performing, and watches over equipment efficiency like a mother hen.

Also, the company publishes a quarterly newsletter, "4 Seasons", as an educational tool for existing clients, former clients, real estate developers, universities and trade publications.

On sending the publication to former clients, Akerman says, "We want our past clients to know if they want to come back they can. We want our name in front of them at all times."

At the end of each year, Northwest personnel meet and discuss company strengths and weaknesses. "We pick out our three worst weaknesses and try to make them strengths in the future," says Akerman.

Wathey, Akerman and staff then look at the economy and project what they can sell over the next year.

Northwest workers believe in teamwork, a concept Akerman learned as a 5-11, 267-pound offensive guard for the University of Oregon in the late 1960s and early '70s. Two notable teammates were San Diego Charger quarterback Dan Fouts and NBC football commentator and former NFL star Ahmad Rashad.

### Dedication

"Our company is dedicated to providing quality products and services to our clients in the landscape industry," says Akerman.

Northwest is everywhere. Nike,

Another impressive Northwest job—the Oregon Graduate Center research facility in Beaverton, Ore.

Intel, Mentor Graphics, Tektronics—the company has many giant-sized clients. The buildings are sharp, the landscape superb.

"We only offer service and quality—you can't do anything else. People today sometimes don't get a lot of service but if you offer it, they'll spend the money," says Akerman, while preparing an urgent quote for a potential client.

Northwest prepares to better serve clients in the future by beefing

up the company's design/build services.

"We believe the future is in design/build and we're heading that way," says Akerman.

One way he's doing that is by hiring landscape architects as part of the team instead of competing against them. "That way they can have their business. We're not in competition." That attitude has helped growth in the design/build end.—by Ken Kuhajda

Daniels. "We've never been a company to dwell on anything. We just go after something else."

Daniels is a proponent of team management. And he has assembled a good team: chairman Art Davis, vice-president Scott Forrester, secretary-treasurer Scot Davis, contract administrator Dan Tamminga and vice-president David Lindorfer.

"Our people have to be the tops," Daniels says. "We can't settle for less. Those guys have pushed me to my limits. When my alarm goes off at 5:45 a.m., I know there's 30 or 40 managers' feet hitting the floor at the same time."

Top managers at Davis work 10 to 12 hours a day, five days a week. That kind of a schedule might burn out many executives. But not the people at Davis.

Tamminga, who is married and has one son, does like it, though, when things get a little slower. "You have a higher frustration rate with the long hours," he says. "And the family puts a lot of pressure on. But what keeps me going is that I know there's a breather at the end of the

## SHOOTING THE MOON

From zero to \$8.4 million in sales in just six years, Davis Landscape Contractors know no bounds.

Contrary to the controlled growth of Northwest, Davis Landscape Contractors of Gaithersburg, Md. has blown the top off its growth chart. Begun in 1981, Davis experienced

total sales of \$8.4 million this past season.

"We haven't set a limit on what 'the moon' is for Davis," notes company president and CEO Chris



Fairview Park, where Davis crews must cope with turf, tree, shrub and water management.

## LANDSCAPE PROFILE

year. I sort of re-evaluate in the slow season."

Lindorfer, a newlywed, says, "We all approach the burnout, usually in the fall. If this was a 12-month season, we wouldn't handle the pace. January and February are the two most important months, when everybody can get recharged."

### \$1 million, 3 trucks

The Davises and Daniels started the company in Harrisburg, Pa. in 1980 with a \$1 million budget and three trucks. Gradually, the company's sphere of influence widened to Hilton Head, S.C., Gaithersburg, Md. and Raleigh, N.C.

The turning point was when Davis was awarded the \$300,000 Shady Grove Metro project in Rockville, Md. "We overcame, perhaps, the strictest and most complex governmental specifications in order to complete the job on time and within budget," notes Lindorfer. "The competition was expecting us to falter, but we didn't."

By 1984, sales exceeded \$2.3 million at the Gaithersburg branch alone, and \$3.4 million for the entire company.

### A working philosophy

Bases of the company's working philosophy are quality, fair price and performance.

"We always keep our word," notes Scot Davis. "If I have to pull a crew out of Harrisburg to make a deadline in Washington, D.C., I'll do it. And I have."

Davis—called DLC by its employees—has a personnel recruiting program geared to high credentials. More than 45 employees have college degrees. Six are certified landscape architects and five have horticulture degrees.

"But," Daniels notes, "DLC also has a lot of fantastic employees who don't have college degrees. The executive, white-collar and blue-collar mix in this company is very balanced. More importantly, we promote from within, so most of our employees know what it's like to have been at the end of a shovel at one point in their lives."

"We sell opportunity."

Growth like DLC's means, obviously, some radical financing. Daniels says that the company's strong track record—from the very beginning—of predictability and

dependability allowed DLC to secure short-term working capital when needed. "But equally important is the line-by-line analysis and breakdown which has consistently come out very close to projected amounts," Daniels adds.

DLC management reviews work-in-progress reports monthly and income statements every 30 days.

"Many businessmen fail without the understanding and ability to project and forecast why and when

they need cash," says Daniels.

"Our system has explicitly shown our people where they are and where they are heading," notes Scot Davis. "Our people have the information in advance to evaluate a problem and the tools and company support to react quickly to resolve them."

There is no secret to the success at Davis Landscape Construction: it's as simple as "people plus performance equals profit."

—Jerry Roche



The Davis management team: (from left) vice-president Scott Forrester, contract administrator Dan Tamminga, president Chris Daniels and vice-president Dave Lindorfer at U.S. Fidelity & Guaranty Insurance.



U.S. Fidelity & Guaranty Insurance, one of Davis's more valued accounts.

## THE GRADUATE

Eldon Dyk left school to join Allen Keesen Landscaping. It was like 'graduating,' and Dyk is not sorry he made the switch.



Eldon Dyk (left) and Allen Keesen 'found' each other in 1981.

**E**ldon Dyk felt trapped. After 15 years as a teacher, coach and assistant principal on the high school level, he felt he wasn't getting anywhere. It was, he admits, his "mid-life crisis."

At the same time, Allen Keesen of Allen Keesen Landscaping, Denver, Col., was toying with adding a maintenance division to his already-successful design/build division.

Five years ago, Dyk and Keesen found each other. The result has been a growing company.

Dyk, who grew up on a Montana farm, visited Joe Marsh and Rod Bailey, both successful landscape contractors, before he even sat behind his new desk. The market was not easy to learn, but he had a head start because he knew how to deal with people.

"I'm a people person in terms of dealing with labor and clients," Dyk notes now. "That's something I did as a teacher, coach and assistant principal."

Most of the clients own office buildings, though the list includes some homeowner associations and three residences.

"Homeowner associations are the hardest to deal with," Dyk notes. "They complain about the little things, picky things. But if they've got a good strong president or one person who will really take charge, we don't have much of a problem. None of those picky things get to my door."

Not very many of the landscapes are large, but all have irrigation.

Because land is so expensive in the fast-growing Denver area, business owners hesitate to buy much more than they need, hence a minimum need for landscape maintenance. "I bid things by the square foot, not the acre," Dyk observes.

A lack of rain around the "Mile-High City" also creates the necessity

for irrigation. "If you don't have a sprinkler here, you won't have a landscape," Dyk says. "All our clients have sprinkler systems that we're totally in charge of."

### One-trailer beginnings

The landscape division's growth has been steady since it was formed in 1981. It began with one trailer and two employees. Twenty-five people are now employed: seven regular crews, one remedial crew and one sprinkler repair crew.

"One thing that has surprised me—that I feel good about—is the amount of growth," says Dyk. "A lot of it has been on our reputation. I do some 'cold-calling' in the winter, but most of our jobs have been through management companies and developers who know our reputation."

Darrel Bolton, who has been Dyk's assistant for three years, handles the crews, plus assignments, hiring, scheduling and other personnel duties.

The company's inventory of equipment looks like this:  $\frac{3}{4}$ -ton four-wheel drive Chevy trucks,

HMC/Green Machine blowers and trimmers, Bobcat 21-inch walk-behind mowers, two F.D. Kees riders, one Toro Groundsmaster 52, and four 42-inch Walker riders.

"We recently purchased the Walkers," says Dyk. "We really like

### The four-day work week creates a situation where holidays and rain can easily be accommodated.

them for their mobility and grass-catching ability."

The company has three licensed pesticide applicators on its payroll, even though insecticide spraying of trees and shrubs is sub-contracted out.

### No slack time

Well-organized three-person crews work four 10-hour days a week from

May through September.

"The foremen organize crews in such a way that all the members know exactly what their next task is. There's no slack time with people waiting until somebody else is done," Dyk boasts. "They're completely in sync."

The four-day work week creates a situation where holidays and rain can easily be accommodated.

Dyk will hire a minimum of summer help, especially after last year's experience.

"We had to replace seven really sharp kids at the end of August," he remembers. "In one month, we've gone through as many as 13 or 14 people trying to replace those kids. It's really frustrating. It's been a real struggle in the past."

Despite the problems, Allen Keesen Landscaping is a company on the grow. Eldon Dyk, now past his "mid-life crisis," is growing with it.

"This job has been totally different than anything I've ever done," he concludes. "But it's been exciting and challenging."

—Jerry Roche



Alan Keesen considers snowplowing a necessary evil—especially high in the Rockies.

# THE EMERALD NECKLACE

The 19,000 acres of Cleveland's Metroparks System provide a challenge even for 350 peak-season workers.

by Carl Kovac

**K**eeping Greater Cleveland's "Emerald Necklace" sparkling is mostly a case of "if it ain't broke, don't fix it."

It's not an easy job, considering that the "necklace," known officially as the Cleveland Metroparks System, consists of almost 19,000 acres of rolling, wooded hills, valleys and open fields in 12 reservations draped around the eastern, southern and western fringes of Cuyahoga County.

Worked into this scenic strand are more than 100 miles of park roads providing access to wildlife management areas and waterfowl sanctuaries; picnic areas and playfields; hiking, bridle, all-purpose and physical fitness trails; six golf courses; swimming and boating areas; stables; tobogganing, sledding, skating and cross-country skiing areas and four nature centers.

"Our aim is to preserve and

enhance the natural environment," explains Mark Oesterle, superintendent of parks for the Cleveland Metroparks, who oversees some 150 full-time workers and approximately 200 seasonal employees.

#### **Wanted: weeds**

Weeds are left pretty much alone throughout most of the system. Some weeds, in fact, add to the necklace's glitter. For example, the July edition of *The Emerald Necklace*, the Metroparks' monthly newsletter, tells readers that "Joe-pye and common milkweed both unfold pale purple blossoms this week. Take time to smell a milkweed—a pleasant surprise!" and "Enjoy the summer woods as we search for wildflowers and weeds that bloom (this month)."

"We don't try to keep any of our grassy areas totally weed-free; we're not concerned with it," Oesterle reports. "We do some weed control, mostly around parking lot posts, road delineators and sign posts, and along bridle trails. String Trimmers have been such a big help. We use chemicals, like Roundup, only in areas where we need longer kill periods. About the only other chemicals we handle are in the swimming pools."

Oesterle explains that Metroparks uses Stihl string trimmers for the most part because "we have found them to be light and durable and easily used by inexperienced seasonal employees. We can drop off a couple of seasonal people, accompanied by a worker on a riding mower, and together they can clear a large area in a relatively short time. The mower cuts six-foot swaths and the String Trimmers trim around trees, picnic tables, buildings, signs, and so on."

Grassy areas are seeded



Last year almost 400,000 golfers played at the six Metropark Golf Courses, including this one, Big Met.

Carl Kovac is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.



**Picnic tables are anchored on crusher-run gravel pads to facilitate mowing the surrounding grass.**

periodically with Park mix: one-third bluegrass, one-third red fescue and one-third perennial rye. "Some heavily-used places, like picnic areas, wear down faster than others. What we've been doing over the past five years is choose three to five of these areas at a time and go in with special crews who rototill the ground and seed it.

"We've also been building table pads in picnic areas," he continues. "We strip the topsoil, then use crusher-run gravel to build a mound six inches above the surrounding grade. The mound is rolled and picnic tables and a grill are anchored in place. The grass around the pad is then brought to the edge. The advantage of this is that mowers can move around the pads, close to the tables, saving a tremendous amount of time."

In addition to approximately 80 string trimmers, the Metroparks also use riding mowers, most of them Cushman models with six-foot front-mounted cutting decks, for fine cutting in picnic and other grassy

areas. Ford tractors pull flail mowers over large fields. "Each reservation probably has 20 to 24 riding mowers plus a tractor," Oesterle says. "The tractors also are used for raking and other chores in the winter."

#### **Busier than most**

Maintenance personnel at the Metroparks golf courses also follow the "if-it-ain't-broke" philosophy. "We don't do anything different here than other courses do, except that we're probably busier," says Frank Blatnick, the system's superintendent of golf courses.

Last year, 389,607 players took on Big Met, Manakiki, Sleepy Hollow (all 18-hole courses); Little Met and Mastick Woods (each nine-hole); and Shawnee Hills (which has a par-27, nine-hole executive course, a regulation par-36 nine-hole course and a driving range). Interestingly, senior citizens accounted for 21.8 percent of total play at the Metroparks courses in 1985.

Construction of an additional nine holes at Shawnee Hills, at an

estimated cost of about \$100,000 per hole, was begun last fall. The project includes leveling hills and removing trees and brush. When completed in early 1988, Shawnee Hills will have an 18-hole, par-72 course approximately 6,316 yards long; the official length will be set by the Professional Golfers' Association (PGA). The 1,323-yard nine-hole executive course will remain unchanged.

"We keep the courses in as good shape as possible," says Blatnick. "We water fairways on the 18-hole courses, we fertilize the tees, fairways and greens on a regular basis, and we use chemicals to curb crabgrass and insects. We normally don't seed. But bent, the fescues and perennial ryegrasses are used when we have to." His crews use triplex and gang mowers to keep the courses trim.

Pre-emergence chemicals are used in the spring for crabgrass control; contact leaf herbicides are sprayed or applied with spreaders in the spring and fall; and fungicides are used as needed, Blatnick says. Insecticides to control white grubs and ataenius beetles also are used.

#### **Overlapping species**

In addition to grasses, weeds and a wide variety of shrubs and wildflowers, the Emerald Necklace also boasts more than 100 species of trees, tended by a small forestry crew headed by natural resource specialist Joan Pfingsten.

"Because of our geography and climate, we're really in an interesting position here," she says. "Many of the species overlap geographically. We have boreal forest trees found in Canada, and we have flood plain forests in addition to beech, maple and oak trees native to this area."

Pfingsten says that "we do an awful lot of planting in the spring and fall. We have eight nurseries—well, actually 7½. The deer are working on one harder than I am."

"We employ selective release," she reports. "We feature certain trees along certain trails, for example, depending on the season. This way, we keep the park roads looking attractive. After all, it's the first thing people see; it's a first impression."

All of the people who keep the Emerald Necklace shimmering are apparently doing the right things. Last year, more than 21.5 million visitors took the opportunity to bask in the radiance of the necklace's gems. **WT&T**



**Frank Blatnick, superintendent of Cleveland Metroparks' six golf courses.**



**Mark Oesterle, superintendent of the Cleveland Metroparks System.**