

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.

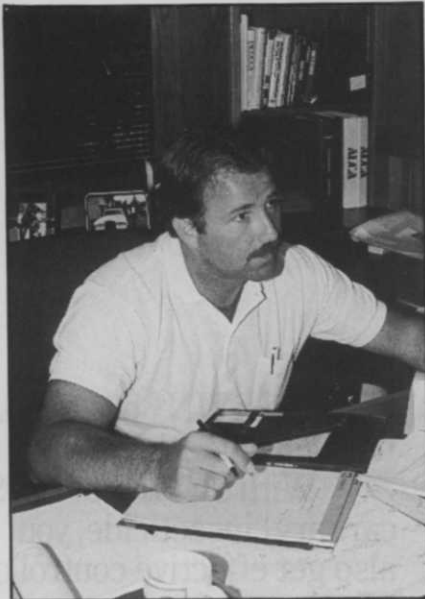
Of course, million dollar figures can be a real motivator to a company. But, when you can landscape for some of the world's richest people, it would just be boring to work any place else.

—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.'

When 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