

Surviving the green industry: It's not as easy as it looks

PAINESVILLE, Ohio — "Entering the landscaping business is easy; survival is not," says Kurt Kluznik of Yardmaster, Inc.

Kluznik and co-owner Rick Colwell met when they were in their teens, and have been business partners ever since. Yardmaster, their landscape architecture/contracting/maintenance company, was born in 1971. Though headquarters are here, branch offices were opened in Pittsburgh (1987) and Bedford, Ohio (1989).

Kluznik says he understands how someone serving as a foreman for a landscape company can reach a point where owning



Yardmaster's Ed Gallagher (left) confers with crew members on a daily basis to keep things running smoothly.

a business looks like the only way to go.

"You get the entrepreneurial drive," he says. "You want to be a boss, you get tired of taking orders, you want to work when you want, hand pick the jobs, make more money."

But there is a price to pay, "when people experience business for a few months or a few years, and they find out that even though they think they are their own boss, in reality the customer is the boss, and you do what you have to do to satisfy the customer."

And being the company president doesn't necessarily mean the minions do all the work. Kluznik says ownership—especially in the early days of a company—"means you work seven days a week, or handle collections, handle the slow times and replace or

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Signed: Joe Bilderbach, Vice President/Circulation



Kluznik: Listen to customers

repair the equipment you didn't save up for. There is a lot of responsibility in being self-employed."

Yardmaster specializes in commercial property maintenance and residential landscaping. Current accounts number about 130.

Colwell handles the

landscaping division, while Kluznik oversees sales and the maintenance group.

Ed Gallagher, landscape management manager, says Yardmaster's maintenance business grew by about 50 percent in 1989, thanks to the Yardmaster name and its ability to provide maintenance on design/build jobs.

"Most of the major contractors know Yardmaster's the largest landscaper in Ohio and they're going to come to us initially to get bids," says Gallagher proudly. "They want to work with a substantial company."

Gallagher says one of the Yardmaster strategies is to establish accounts with companies currently relying on in-house crews, as done recently at an liberal arts private school and hospital.

"We show them what a maintenance contractor can do for them and their costs," explains Gallagher. "We can do in a day what it ordinarily takes a week for their own people (to accomplish)."

An important moment in the Yardmaster history occurred when Kluznik and Colwell decided to contact a business consulting firm, Ross Payne & Associates.

Business consultation, despite the extra costs involved, proved to be a worthy ingredient in the success formula. Combined with Kluznik's and Colwell's natural business skills, Yardmaster has maintained consistent annual growth of 25 to 30 percent, according to Gallagher: "We're a \$6 million operation with 180 to 200 employees."

—Terry McIver □

Knoop campaign wins excellence

DALLAS — "Don't Bag It," a lawn care program that reduces yard waste going into landfills by recycling grass clippings instead of bagging them, has earned the EPA's award of excellence for solid waste management.

Dr. Bill Knoop, a Texas A&M turfgrass specialist who devised the program, says, "People who want to make a difference in preserving the environment can do something that works—and do it immediately without spending a lot of time or money."

Robert E. Layton of the EPA says, "These efforts will help prevent us from burying ourselves in our own garbage."

For more information, read the article beginning on page 30. □

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