

Making waves in the desert

When clients in the red-hot Las Vegas market want action from Par-3 Landscape and Maintenance, one call is all it takes.

by DON DALE

Mark Rockwell isn't just riding an unprecedented wave of growth in Las Vegas, he's helping to create it. Par-3 Landscape and Maintenance, the company he founded just over two years ago, took off even faster than Rockwell had envisioned.

He credits much of this success to the business philosophy that he and partners Shawn Buckley, Paul Jaramillo and Charlie Norton, subscribe to—do quality work for clients who appreciate and can afford quality work.

"When I do a bid for somebody I tell them I'm not the cheapest, but I'll do a good job," Rockwell says. His clients now include such high profile properties as the New York New York casino, McCarran Airport and The Gardens, an exclusive residential subdivision. His company has gone from five to 35 employees in just the two years.



Rockwell, right, with Mark Murphy in front of one of their most visible clients, New York, New York. Murphy is the Par-3 Landscape and Maintenance foreman at the site.

The real secret to Par-3's success, in addition to the quality of its work, is the promptness and thoroughness of its service.

"Call-backs have to be gotten back to," Rockwell emphasizes. "If they call you, you need to be back there that day. Property managers don't want to wait three or four days."

That might not be the case on an athletic field or a strip mall, but a hotel or homeowner's association demands excellent service in order to maintain a manicured look. That's what sells their business, and that's what Rockwell provides.

Make it glisten in the sun

"A property manager wants that property to shine," and a broken sprinkler head spraying ten feet in the air isn't a good advertisement for them—or for their landscaper.

"I know it takes time, but we have a separate employee who just takes calls," Rockwell says. In fact, he's set up his company to respond to service calls as quickly and efficiently as possible.

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A Par-3 Landscape residential construction site in the Mountain Trails subdivision—workers installing mature trees to give a finished look to an upscale job

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First, he has a roving supervisor who oversees his six crew foremen. That supervisor also either handles service calls himself or gets somebody else on it right away.

Another set of eyes

"He's actually another set of eyes for me," Rockwell says of Clinton Aldana, his mobile supervisor. It's easy for a crew to overlook details on a maintenance job, and the man-

ager on wheels helps spot defects just as Rockwell does.

Since irrigation problems are by far the number one call-in for service, Rockwell has a small truck set up just for irrigation projects. It is stocked with heads, risers, pipe, fittings, valves and other commonly used parts—plus a good irrigation man.

This truck darts all over Las Vegas, responding to irrigation emergencies. When



Rockwell at a site he designed and installed in the Desert Trails subdivision.

there's no emergency, the irrigation man helps out on other jobs or follows the mowing crew to fix any damaged sprinkler heads.

"Now that it's hotter, I may have to provide another guy to ride with him," Rockwell says of summer, when irrigation problems mount up quickly.

The other common call-in problems are turf hot spots and physical damage to landscaping or equipment. Making those service call-backs make Par-3 shine in Las Vegas. The rapid accumulation of contracts is proof that the company satisfies its clientele.

Maintenance secrets

As far as quality maintenance goes, mowing, weeding and edging are all pretty standard practices. But Rockwell has a couple of secrets for doing an excellent job.

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The first is with flowers, which are often used by upscale developments.

"Annual color has to be fresh all the time," he says. He says he not only has a nice eye for designing beds and variety mixes, but he also goes the extra mile to keep flowers fresh for the four months that a bed typically has to last. He puts down good, balanced fertilizer that gives immediate

growth and sustains the plants over the long term. He also selects varieties that will stretch their color longer.

"I can plant something in October and have it last until March or April," he notes. By selecting pansies and flowering kale, for example, he will get good longevity in the winter. In the summer those will change to vincas and salvia. He also has his crews do a lot of "dead-heading," or plucking off

dying flower heads so that plants regenerate new flowers promptly. That keeps a bed fresh past its prime.

"That's something that makes the property manager say, 'Wow, I love this company.'"

Another secret is to keep shrubs trimmed, Rockwell says. If he has a contract to trim once a month, he may trim more often on a site that wants that manicured look. His crew at New York New York will also wash off dusty plants to keep them fresh looking.

Rockwell's own secret is that he likes the design and construction end of his business more than the maintenance end. And he wants the company to grow there too.

One job at a time

Currently he has a five-man crew devoted to installation, specializing in upscale residential projects. He does only one construction job at a time, and wants to add another crew to double his capabilities.

"There's a lot of work out there flowing our way," he says, and he loves residential design. Large maintenance jobs earn the company the most money, but he has to keep his creative spirit energized too.

Word of mouth is bringing a lot of design business his way, though he likes the informal rather than the blueprint approach. He has a technique for pleasing top-end residential clients: bigger plants.

"When you do an upscale looking job you want a more mature landscape immediately," he says. Thus, a canary palm tree may cost \$200 per foot, but if a new homebuilder is spending over a million dollars on a house he will also spend \$6,000 on two mature canary palms.

Rockwell also features commercial-grade irrigation systems for upscale homes and proper soil-building. In a region where the heat and terrible soils are a given, these are ways he can insure that a homeowner will remain happy with his landscaping job over the years.

Growth is good, Rockwell says, and Par-3 wants more of it. And a company that does quality work to attract quality clients will certainly grow. □



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