

One company,



The full-service approach worked for the DiSanto Companies when a \$4.1 billion Cleveland-based corporation built beautiful new headquarters

By RON HALL/ Managing Editor

Offering clients "one-stop shopping" builds customer satisfaction, believes the DiSanto Companies, a Cleveland-area landscape company.

The 38-year-old firm got an opportunity to demonstrate just that this past summer as it installed the landscape at the new world headquarters of the Parker Hannifin Corporation.

The landscape company's biggest challenge? A killer deadline, made even tighter by unfavorable weather.

It's biggest opportunity? Shining on the

many services

installation and earning a long-term maintenance contract.

The DiSanto Companies was started in 1959 by brothers George and the late Denis DiSanto. They learned a lot about landscaping from their father who had been an estate gardener. Employing about 35 people in season, The DiSanto Companies continues to maintain quite a bit of residential work, most of it in Cleveland's most affluent neighborhoods. But it's also building its commercial clientele.

Parker Hannifin is a \$4.1 billion manufacturer of motion-control components and systems used in industry and aerospace. For 62 years its home was a four-story building in Cleveland. In March 1996 it broke ground at its new location on a 32-acre site in neighboring Mayfield Heights, Ohio.

The 208,000-foot building and its surrounding landscape had to be ready by summer's end. Parker Hannifin had planned a week of open house celebrations and press

conferences to showcase its new headquarters—and, particularly, its growing stature as a international systems producer.

Local contractors, including the DiSanto Companies, pushed themselves to make sure that the headquarters were, in fact, ready.

Tree care, weather challenges

Site planning, and some other important decisions, were made before the DiSanto Companies earned the landscape

Books on service

A Complaint is a Gift, by Janelle Barlow & Claus Møller; Berrett-Koehler Publishers, 1996.

Positively Outrageous Service, by Scott T. Gross; Warner Books (1991).

Service Breakthroughs: Changing the Rules of the Game, by James L. Heskett; The Free Press (1990).

◀ **The Parker Hannifin headquarters. With a three year contract, The DiSanto Companies can commit to specialized equipment or materials for the property.**

▶ **Tim Korte: client knew benefits of functional and attractive landscaping.**



construction contract. For instance, landscape architect Knight & Stolar, Inc, and Parker Hannifin had already decided to save and relocate 36 mature trees at the site.

The property contained a nice selection of hardwoods, mostly oaks and maples. They had been planted decades ago to define fairways. The site had been a golf course before being developed into the Landerhaven Corporate Center.

"They went to extraordinary lengths to protect these trees from construction," says Tim Korte, vice president of operations of the DiSanto Companies. His company planted another 130 new trees on the site.

"The biggest challenge for us turned out to be the weather, starting with a wet spring," explains Korte. "Construction was behind because of the weather. (Workers moved 75,000 cubic yards of earth.) Then when it turned dry in the summer we had to establish what amounted to 13 acres of turfgrass at once." He chose turf-type tall fescue since some of the turfgrass areas weren't going to be irrigated.

As construction progressed through the summer, Korte felt that Parker Hannifin's appreciation of the value of a functional and attractive landscape grew.

"Even though people are driving by these commercial sites at 35 mph, we're discovering that clients are becoming more particular about every square inch of their properties," says Korte. Curb appeal (image) remains vital, but employers are finding that appropriate landscaping builds employee morale too. More and more workers at these corporate locations are using the grounds to relax during lunch, or to walk or jog.

"They're even starting to develop areas, maybe at the back of their properties, that four or five years ago they would have said, 'don't worry about it. We're not going back there,'" says Korte.

While the DiSanto Companies had earned the installation contract, that was no guarantee that it could land the maintenance contract too. DiSanto had to bid the project just like everybody else. And the company realized that it couldn't—nor did it want to be—the low bidder.

"Mature clients know what it costs to bid, and they know what services cost," says Korte. "They also know that they don't have the personnel to do the maintenance themselves."

Service mix a winning edge

Korte believes that Parker Hannifin chose the DiSanto Companies as their maintenance company, in part at least, because it could provide so many different services.

"They've asked us to be involved with everything outside, including the parking lot," says Korte. "Our company does a lot more work than the number of our employees would suggest. We concentrate most of our efforts on what we can do best, and we have excellent subcontractors who can do the rest."

He says the client benefits greatly because the installer is still on-premises, and can make any additions or improvements to the landscape as the client's budget allows.

The landscape company benefits from a three-year contract because it can commit to specialized equipment or materials for the property.

The business trend is definitely toward landscape companies that can provide many different services to the same client.

"You have to be ready to move on what each customer wants or that customer will look for someone else," says Korte. "There are a lot of companies that are willing to provide a lot of services, and we're one of them."

CUSTOMER SATISFACTION TIPS

Rick Kier, president of ProScapes, Jamesville, NY:

▶ "Offer only those services you are prepared to perform correctly, efficiently and profitably. This may change from day to day, depending on the capacity and availability of your current resources, including management and crew time, material and equipment."

▶ "If your scheduled routes are filled to capacity, and you sell a big job without the ability to expand your resources, you are guaranteeing customer dissatisfaction."

Howard Freilich, CEO, Blondie's Treehouse, Inc., Larchmont, NY:

▶ "The customer is always right, because if it were not for them, we wouldn't be here. I believe longevity of service is the best measure of whether or not we are offering good customer service."

Richard Ackerman, president, Northwest Landscape Industries, Portland, Ore.:

▶ "A company can deliver the absolute best quality landscape, but if you don't maintain exceptional customer service, you'll probably lose the business."



David Harris, president, Liqui-Green Lawn Care, Bloomington, Illinois.:

▶ "It starts in the way we present and perform our service. If delivery is good, it takes away the variable that promotes dissatisfaction. It is essential to find the best employees you can with positive attitudes. Get the job done right the first time."

