

STATE OF THE INDUSTRY

Active associations get member 'OK'

Activism motivated by need for fair legislation is appreciated by memberships at both local and national levels.

By JAMES E. GUYETTE

Associations that serve lawn/landscape professionals are generally considered to be healthy, productive and cost-effective. Business owners say they appreciate the opportunities that they offer for talking shop with their colleagues. They equally appreciate their role in monitoring and dealing with government regulations.

"They benefit the industry in general, and that's the return-on-investment I'm looking for," says Kevin Killmer, president and CEO at Environmental Earth-

scapes Inc., dba The Groundskeeper in Tucson, Phoenix, Las Vegas and Palm Desert, CA.

"They provide networking opportunities and they provide credibility to our profession," says Killmer. "Goodwill and

public support is important." Killmer is most concerned with laws involving immigration, pollution, and noise involving outdoor power equipment. Thus, the Groundskeeper holds membership in both national and regional green industry organizations.

Killmer says that associations give the industry its voice. "We've been successful in getting state and local governments to acknowledge our plight," Killmer says.

Members of the Nevada Landscape Association (NLA) have had a similar battle. For example, some legislators in Nevada object to the very notion of having lawns and shrubs. The NLA has worked to help educate them otherwise. While the NLA supports water conservation, in general, it opposes restrictions on the planting of lawns and ornamentals.

"We've worked to have a role to play over water restrictions," reports NLA president Paul Flint, owner of the Reno-based Lawns, Etc. "It's served

us exceedingly well here."

Oddly enough, in some parts of Nevada there are laws still on the books that prohibit even the installation of water

meters. The NLA is pushing for the metering of water use; then people who want green in their yards can simply pay more green for the privilege. "We're currently taking steps to implement that plan," says Flint.

"On a cost-benefit basis there's so much more that

we can gain with local organizations."

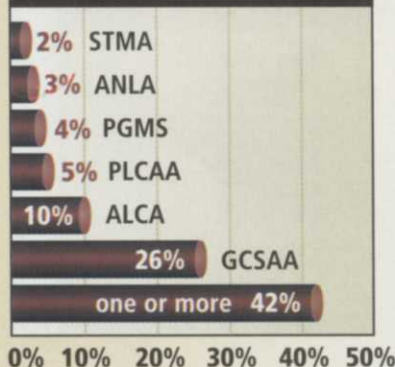
Having the backing of a national organization is a big boost for Daryl Kirkland, Better Lawn and Garden in Phenix City, AL. He values his membership in the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA). "Being affiliated with PLCAA helps solidify my company and make it a better operation," he says.

Kirkland reads all the PLCAA mailings to keep abreast of equipment technology and advances in chemical developments. And he uses the PLCAA logo and that of the Alabama Nurserymen's



Amstutz: in PLCAA at start of company.

MEMBERSHIP IN GREEN INDUSTRY ORGANIZATIONS



Association to advertise his company's commitment to excellence.

PLCAA is a valuable resource for **John Wagner**, of the GreensKeepers Inc., Muscle Shoals, AL. "They've helped me to make the transition from the golf course to lawn care," says Wagner a former golf course superintendent.

ALCA is appreciated in Erie, PA, where **John Allin** employs more than 40 year-round employees at his Allin Companies landscaping and snowplowing enterprise. "It has raised our level of professionalism several notches since we joined five years ago," he says.

"The first time we visited one of the shows we got an eye-opening experience as to how the other companies see themselves as professionals, and we have changed our opinion of ourselves," Allin explains. The workers now strive to win ALCA safety awards, management's marketing strategies are more coherent and employees' attitudes are more business-like and client-oriented.

"The money we spend (on dues, traveling and hotels) is minor compared to the return that we get; ALCA satisfies my needs in a big way."

Allin has also been instru-

mental in forming the national Snow and Ice Management Association, based in Erie, PA. The association offers information on how to run a profitable winter business.

David P. Harris of Illinois is considering joining ALCA after 18 years in the lawn care industry. He previously belonged to PLCAA, but has since sold his Liqui-Green Lawn and Tree Care and focused his attention on the Bloomington-based Harris and Associates, a design-build firm.

"ALCA looks pretty good to me so I'll probably be joining that," Harris says. "I don't join associations unless I think it's necessary," he says adding that PLCAA served him well in lawn care. Opportunities for networking, attending seminars and walking the trade show floor are significant, and Harris especially values the roundtable discussions featuring out-of-town businesses owners and their insights.

"And you weren't giving away trade secrets to your direct competition," he says.

Education is what **Becky**



Harris: valued PLCAA membership

Turner wants from the Perennial Plant Association.

Turner. "They cover the whole gamut of growing, maintaining and selling," says Turner who owns Perennial Point in Wilkes Barre, PA.

The green industry can use some sharper teeth

when it comes to policing its own ranks, according to

Michael Martin, commercial division manager at Outside Unlimited Inc. of Hampstead, MD. "I think there needs to be some kind of governing body that looks over the industry," Martin says.

"There should be some type of industry standards to regulate lowballing and other aspects of business competition."

Nothing extreme, mind you, but Martin suggests that some sort of ethics system is needed. "I don't want to have 'Big Brother' looking over our shoulders, but sometimes things are too loose." A plant inspection or certification program would be helpful to review the problem of too-small root balls and other aspects of unfair competition, Martin believes. "If I'm putting in a 2-inch caliper

maple, I want to see somebody else's 2-inch caliper maple look the same way."

Allowing established business owners to share their expertise with up-and-coming landscape managers via PLCAA's new mentoring program is great idea, says **Dale Amstutz**, who owns Northern Lawns Inc. in Omaha, NB. "They're lining up people to help each other," he reports.

The association-based contacts and friendships formed by Amstutz have been a great

help to this industry veteran. "I think we were in business one year when we started attending, and I haven't missed a national meeting since," he says.

To Amstutz, anyone in this industry—even a start-up operation—should be-

long to associations. "This is not the place to cut corners," he advises. "That's a lot of money for a small business to shell out, but once you go you'll find yourself coming back year after year."

"It's not a direct business profit and loss type of thing. You've got to go with an open mind and a willingness to make things happen," he points out.

"You have to be out there shaking hands and passing out business cards."



Flint: devotes energies at state level



Allin: ALCA a big help to his firm