

Bozzuto 'gives back,' has fun

At its annual outing, Bozzuto Landscaping Co. combines friendly competition with camaraderie and community service

This past September — as it has two years previously — the Bozzuto Landscaping Co., Upper Marlboro, Md., served the community around Prince George's County with a pro bono project to spruce up a local community center.

And while they worked, Bozzuto's 85 crew people also went head-to-head in a team competition to make the work more enjoyable and entertaining for visitors.

This year, the company gave landscaping materials and free labor to the Kettering/Largo Community Center in Prince George's County.

"This is the third year we've done it," says company President Tom Davis. Bozzuto is a \$4.5-million commercial landscape contracting and maintenance company with 85 employees. The entire Bozzuto Group employs 420.

Davis hit upon the event a few years ago while brainstorming over where to hold a company picnic. "This is a great opportunity to show our community and service area who we are, what we do and why we do it," he says.

Each year, Bozzuto solicits up to 20 community centers to see which is the most deserving or most interested in the landscape facelift. Ease of access for visitors is also a deciding factor.

Some work, some play

The competition includes nine events. Some are serious, some are silly. But all make for an entertaining and worthwhile



Over \$10,000 in services and landscaping materials are donated for the event, which are used in the landscaping competitions.

day. The serious events are plant installation, plant identification, tire and blade replacement, grounds management and truck/trailer handling.

Silly events include blowing a ball along a track with a leaf blower and a mower obstacle course.

Teams are identified by different colored wrist bands. Davis says the event boosts morale and fosters teamwork.

Equipment is supplied by Kohler Equipment, a local distributor. Pete Basso is the Kohler sales manager who served as a judge at this year's event.

Maintenance & safety test

For the grounds management segment of the competition, contestants improve a portion of the community center.

"We design the new landscaping areas at the community center and break it up into sections," explains Davis. "Each team competes in a section. They mow it, put a signature cut on it (a diamond cut design in the turf), edge the grounds and mulch around trees."

"They also have to connect a trailer to a truck properly and do a pre-trip inspection on the truck and trailer, which is what they must do every morning. This also reinforces our safety policy. Then they have to load their equipment safely," says Davis.

"Then they do a tire change. Many times our guys will blow a tire and change them in the field. This event is for bragging rights."

All Bozzuto field personnel compete in the event, which begins at 10 a.m. and

ends at 2:30 p.m. A barbeque is included in the day's activities.

The event is a high publicity item and is attended by many community leaders, as well as the citizenry. "County executives, council people, political leaders, some of our customers, some of our suppliers come to the competition," says Davis.

"We try to operate our company and employees in a professional manner. We've got community leaders, our clients and our suppliers seeing how a professional landscaping company operates.



Teamwork is necessary for team success, whether it is a practical skill or a silly event.

"At the same time, we get exposure from the event in newspapers, television and magazines. Every time somebody hears of a landscaping company doing something like this, it has to promote the industry," he adds.

Among the judges were Wayne Curry, county executive; Tom Bozzuto, President of The Bozzuto Group; Bonnie Van Fleet public relations manager of ALCA; E.J. Martinez, commercial account representative, TruGreen/ChemLawn; and Bob Voegtlin, acting deputy director, parks and recreation. **LM**

Recruiting and training pay off

Bozzuto's safety record is good, thanks to effective training in every aspect of the job. As of Sept. 1, the company's landscape crew had worked 20 days without a lost time accident.

"We do a ton of safety training, including in-house Spanish training for the company's Hispanic workers," says Tom Davis.

"Our workers comp rates have dropped more than 25 percent in last five

"We like to promote managers from within whenever possible. We've done that for the last four years," he explains.

A cash incentive program motivates employees to bring in crewmen and assistant supervisors. "We pay bonuses to line-level guys to bring in other line-level guys," says Davis. "They bring in solid candidates. They're not going to bring in people who are lazy. It's a very good program — we've run it two or three years now."

Davis says the ongoing industry consolidation is exciting, but says it's too early to tell how the Landcare and TruGreen/ChemLawn ventures will pan out.

"I think time will answer that question. Some of the things I imagine will happen are based on the synergies within the companies. Landcare and TruGreen/ChemLawn — to name two — are industry leaders. There are synergies there that will make them all improve," he notes.

Can giant landscaping conglomerates maintain quality equal to each of its members?

"I think they will have to," says Davis. "Everybody's going to be looking at them under the microscope expecting them *not* to [maintain quality]. I would think that the caliber of companies they acquire would not settle for anything less. It's going to be a real challenge. But I would expect them to figure out how to overcome that."

The battle, says Davis, will be fought on the pricing and service fronts. "My guess is that these larger consolidations can operate on smaller margins. It will be a challenge to compete on a head-to-head level on price. Where we will beat them is on customer service and customer loyalty. We have to be creative; we have to move quickly. A smaller company can make decisions, offer new services and improve customer service a lot quicker than the big guys. And that's where you beat them."

years," says Davis. "We attribute that to our training and the tracking. That's why we started the lost day program."

BLC training goes beyond safety, of course. It employs 15 trained horticulturists. "We designed the 'BLC Short Course in Hort' for our guys that don't go the college route," he explains.

When it recruits workers, the company relies on a fruitful college base for many good employees. "We do a lot of college recruiting for supervisory level positions," says Davis. "From management up, we try to establish that we are not interested in people coming here for only a month or two. That's why we recruit out of colleges. It's a good resource for us to fill our vacancies."

Those management-oriented students enter the company as crew supervisors.