

This industry was built by the contractors and grounds managers who saw opportunities for themselves, and today is no different. Whether you lead a large landscape organization or are a newcomer, you are part of a tradition that started humbly and succeeded because of hard work and good business sense. Until now, the best and the brightest in our industry could pretty much claim this was their story. Our best and brightest are comfortable both in suits and jeans. They know about biology, equipment, operations and keeping customers happy. They also know a lot about finance, profitability and productivity. And, they still get outside a lot.

But now we're seeing a change that's driven by our industry's consolidation. Despite all the fuss about consolidation overtaking our industry, we're told that only about 5% has been consolidated so far. Participants in a January seminar I just attended on mergers and acquisitions said there literally are "trillions" of dol-

lars in the investment world looking for a good home in an industry like ours.

So now we're sexy, just like others who are consolidating: real estate, construction and utility management, to name a few. At the conference, we met representatives of several new consolidation groups who will soon announce their debut into the green industry. And more will follow.

The big money coming into our industry comes in the pockets of a new breed of best and brightest. They're very smart, very educated and very savvy investors, deal-makers and advisors. They routinely handle transactions involving millions of dollars. They know due diligence, stock swaps, tax minimization, business valuation and all other aspects of mergers like they know the back of their hands.

Forget the fact that our best and brightest have years of experience in the landscape business and the new ones don't. Forget the fact that most of them rarely work outside. The new breed is smart enough to learn a lot about our operations and learn it quickly.

So how will this affect you? Will you learn about the consolidators as quickly as they've learned about you? Will you understand how these new consolidations will operate in your markets and how they'll affect your firm? Will you have enough savvy to make the right decision when someone invites you to sell?

Some of the contractors at the meeting said they liked this new breed because they bring "professionalism" to our industry. I think they also bring a whole new set of challenges and opportunities to everyone — established firms and beginners alike. And I'd recommend you learn as much about them as you can. Next month, we'll look more closely at consolidation and what it will mean to you. **LM**

Meet the new 'best and brightest'



Sue Gibson

SUE GIBSON
Executive Editor

CONSOLIDATION CLIPS

Ruppert Moves On

Craig Ruppert, founder of Ruppert Landscape in Ashton, MD, has resigned his position as senior vice president of the TruGreen-ChemLawn Landscape Division, headquartered in Memphis. Chris Davitt, also formerly of Ruppert Landscape, has also left TruGreen-ChemLawn. Ruppert can be reached at Ruppert Nurseries, also in Ashton.

Another national player

HOUSTON — GrowScape LLC, based here, is the newest 'national' landscape company. This spring it will announce its seven founding companies, with estimated combined revenues of \$75 million. GrowScape will integrate 'vertically,' offering installation, maintenance, foundation, perennial plant materials, turf, irrigation, architecture and design. The company hopes to be in top 25 U.S. metropolitan areas within four years.