

BY RON HALL / SENIOR EDITOR

## Offering a cultural bridge

**J**ennifer Thomas is an independent contractor just like many of you, except she's probably a lot better looking. Okay, so I'm not being politically correct. Give me a break.

She just happens to be an attractive young lady with a warm, outgoing personality and some special skills that the landscape industry desperately needs right now — namely she communicates as easily in Spanish as she does in English, and she's knowledgeable about Latino culture.

We met her about four years ago just after she started her business, known as Spanish Training Services, headquartered in Evanston, IL, which offers language and cross-cultural training services. She works almost exclusively with Green Industry operations — landscape companies, nurseries, golf courses and lawn care firms among others.

At the time of our first meeting, this seemed like an unusual career choice for such a bright, young person, and we probably didn't do a good job of hiding our skepticism. After all, how much demand could there be for these types of services?

Beyond that, we couldn't imagine she could teach a U.S.-born field foreman enough Spanish or a Hispanic worker enough English to do much good on a customer's landscape. Not in a one- or two-day training session, anyway.

After all, we took years of classroom Spanish and, as far as we can remember, never did learn the Spanish words for mower or shovel or — now that I think about it — not many other words, either. Besides being language impaired, we admit to having formed an opinion without appreciating the value of the services that Jennifer Thomas offers to lawn and landscape companies.

She is among a tiny group of specialized contractors that provides practical training on how to most effectively incorporate Spanish-speaking employees into U.S. Green Industry organizations. The goal is to provide company management and the laborers themselves simple language and cultural bridges to reduce misunderstandings and increase production efficiency.

Regardless of how you feel about the growing number of foreign-born, Spanish-speaking workers in the United States or, specifically, about the federal H2B program that allows them to work in our country seasonally, Hispanic workers have become the labor backbone of the Green Industry. And it looks like they'll continue in that role for some time.

Ms. Thomas, and the few others like her, can help us make the best of that situation. You can reach her at: Spanish Training Services, 719 Emerson St., Evanston, IL 60201. 800/491-0391.

Contact Ron Hall at 440/891-2636 or e-mail at [rhall@advanstar.com](mailto:rhall@advanstar.com)



Jennifer Thomas teaches more than the words "rapido, rapido" in her cross-cultural sessions.

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