

Keep on truckin'

Successful contractors reveal the trucks that work for them, and their dream trucks, too

BY VICKY POULSEN

“**O**ld reliable” is the name landscape professionals prefer to give their most beloved truck. Almost every company has an “old reliable.” It’s the truck that never breaks down and always performs satisfactorily. Landscape professionals stick to proven brands that have given them years of excellent service and reliability. They’ve built partnerships with local truck dealers who can give them the greatest return on their investment, and they’ve employed excellent mechanics to keep their company vehicles in high gear. Three contractors have this to say about their trucks:

Dora Landscaping Company



Jim Oyler

Name: Jim Oyler
Title: President
Location: Apopka, FL
2001 gross revenue: \$10 million
Business mix: Mostly commercial
Employees: “We cur-

rently employ 88 employees, but this will fluctuate to approximately 125 in our peak summer season. The majority of our crews are four-man crews, but we have crews varying from three to eight people depending on the size and scope of our projects.”

Company profile: Dora Landscaping Company began in 1976 in Orlando, FL. “Each year we’ve prudently expanded, striving for excellence and providing only the highest quality service and workmanship at a reasonable cost. We operate four full-service divisions: landscape construction, irrigation, grounds maintenance and Southern Landscape Growers, our wholesale nursery. Landscape construction is our largest division. Highly qualified and trained superintendents manage each project. Our grounds maintenance division provides comprehensive grounds management services. Basic grounds management, integrated pest management (IPM), fertilization, arbor care and floriculture are all services we capably provide. The irrigation division provides build-to-suit and design/build irrigation systems to meet any customer’s needs. Our wholesale nursery



Dora’s fleet includes several extended-cab trucks to fit bigger crews.

occupies a large portion of our 30-acre facility in Orlando. In addition to retail operations, we provide premium materials on retrofit grounds maintenance projects.”

Trucks: Their fleet includes several Ford F-series trucks (150/250) as well as Ford 150 vans, F600 dump trucks, XL-Club wagons, extended-cab pickups, Rangers and Explorers. The company also has Chevy models, which include extended-cab pickups, C1500 extended cabs, Tahoes and Step Vans. Their fleet also includes a Jeep Grand Wagon, Freightliner with 16-ft. flat dump body, Isuzu NPR spray rig, three Nissan Xes, a Nissan pickup truck and an International S1900 dump truck.

Favorite features: Alan Swinburne, mainte-

Trucks with dump beds are a necessity for Anderson's design/build services.

nance operations manager, says his favorite is Ford's Super Duty truck because it's bullet-proof, unstoppable and requires low maintenance. A must-have item in Florida is air conditioning. "It's the only creature comfort we have in these trucks," Swinburne says.

Finance method: The company currently leases 16 vehicles, and 19 vehicles have been purchased. Swinburne says Ford's Trac lease program is a popular option. "We shop around but have a good relationship with the Ford dealer next to us who gives us a good price and excellent service." **Dream truck:** "F-550 crew cab with a flat-bed dump on the back...a Super Duty truck that will do anything big or small."

DeSantis Landscapes



Tom DeSantis

Name: Tom DeSantis
Title: Operations manager
Location: Salem, OR
2001 gross revenue: \$2 million
Business mix: Primarily residential
Employees: 43 in peak season

Company profile: "Founded in 1974 in the Willamette Valley, we built our company with the excellent relationships we formed with our customers, our quality work, our technical expertise, great service and our community involvement. We are a full-service landscape operation from design to sales, with 55% of our business devoted to installation, 30% to maintenance and 12% to irrigation." The company has won regional and state



One of DeSantis's Chevy 3/4-ton pickups



awards, including a "best in all" award for its work at the Children's Garden. It also won a 2001 National Torch Award for Marketplace Ethics and a 2000 regional Business Integrity Award, both presented by the Better Business Bureau. The company was also named one of the best 100 companies to work for by *Oregon Business Magazine* in 2001.

Trucks: "We have four Isuzu 1 1/2-ton trucks (three diesel-powered, one gas), one Chevrolet one-ton with a dump bed, a Chevy one-ton with a four-door large cab, eight Chevy 3/4-ton pickups, one Chevy half-ton and two Toyota half-tons that we use for sales. We have a Chevy one-ton van for our irrigation specialist. We also have maintenance steel trailers, which have been custom designed and built to include an enclosed six-foot-deep box where we keep all our small tools and equipment. In back, the trailers have a spring-assisted open deck which opens easily."

Best features: "Most of our 3/4-ton pickups have an E-Z dump bed for loading and emptying, which has prevented a lot of back injuries. One of our Isuzu trucks has a dump with a three-foot stationary box with tools and doors on either side. The dump bed is something we couldn't live without. We also have a fleet mechanic on duty all the time, and every morning he does safety and maintenance checks on all of the vehicles."

Finance methods: "We buy our trucks. Generally, our trucks run on a 10-year cycle before we buy a new one. It also depends on how well the business is doing. We shop around, but we have a good relationship with a dealer who takes good care of us and has an excellent service department."

Dream truck: "The trucks we have are already great."

Anderson Landscape Construction, Inc.



Fred Anderson

Name: Fred Anderson
Title: President
Location: Lancaster, MA
Business mix: Mostly residential
Employees: 10
2001 gross revenue: \$1.3 million

Company profile: Anderson Landscape Construction is beginning its 20th year as a landscape construction company for high-end residential homes in the greater Boston area. The company generally runs three crews.

Trucks: Their truck fleet includes one 1996 Ford F350, two 1999 Ford F550s, one 1997 Ford Ranger pickup and one 1998 Ford Ranger pickup. This year they expect to buy a four-door Isuzu rackbody truck.

Best features: "They're diesels. The F350 can pull trailers and equipment. The F550s are great for plowing parking lots, and their 8x8 body allows for four pallets of material. The Rangers are great for gas mileage and long commutes, and the Isuzu will be perfect for crew transportation." When deciding to buy a truck, Anderson said serviceability of a particular make is an important consideration. "Fast turnaround for repairs is vital for our business to continue running smoothly. Price is usually not the prime motivator...it has to do with what options are offered and how they fit into our needs for landscape construction."

Finance method: "We like to buy new."

Dream truck: GMC Avalanche.