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DESIGN/BUILD

Building a 'grand' view

New Hampshire landscapers partner with a developer to restore elegance to a grand old hotel

BY RON HALL/ EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Kevin Craffey knew he had a job on his hands in bringing the century-old Mountain View Grand Hotel back to life. The historic hotel in Whitefield, NH, had been vacant since 1986. It had started to fall apart. So had its landscape.

The problem: start from scratch

"The landscape was gone," says the owner of Craffey & Company, a general contracting firm based in Hanover, MA. He bought the resort hotel in 1998 with visions that he and his crew could recondition it and reopen it again in a few months.



Now, after three years of hard work and intense and complicated political and financial deal making, Craffey's dream project is almost done. The restored hotel will welcome guests again this May.

Key to its continuing success as a resort destination, feels the owner, is its landscape that, in spite of being new, had to complement the hotel, surrounded by mountains and overlooking 5,000 acres of unspoiled New England countryside.

The solution: hire local experts

Fortunately, Craffey could count on a pair of local professionals to design and build the "natural" landscape that the site demanded. Roger Petit and Mark Sullivan, partners in R&M Naturescape Designs LLC, brought unique skills to the project.

"He (Craffey) wanted whatever we did to have a natural feel to it," says Sullivan. That request perfectly

R&M workers used hundreds of tons of native stone to build terrace walls, water features.

R&M Naturescape Design pregerminated the turfgrass seed, then used a hydroseeder for faster establishment for the May reopening.

suit the company's expertise, which included the design of habitats and trails, too.

R&M Naturescape's collaboration with Craffey resulted in a landscape that blends two acres of new turf, 250 tons of dry-laid granite, gardens containing almost 100 varieties of annuals, perennials and spring-flowering bulbs and the landscape's signature water features.

Challenges? There were plenty.

Often, landscape crews worked at the same time and in the same areas as tradesmen refurbishing the hotel's exterior, a scheduling nightmare. "Usually, we were working on three or four projects at once, but we tried to plan ahead so that we were always busy somewhere on the site," says Sullivan.

Another challenge was the presence of a stone ledge running the length of the site, and where Sullivan had designed prominent water features. "The ledge ultimately determined where a lot of features were going to go," says Sullivan with a laugh.

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Water and stone features dominate the property — three ponds, two streams (one of 16,000 gallons per hour, the other at 8,000 gph), several sizable waterfalls (including one 9-ft. wide with a 6-ft. drop), and an antique 5-tier fountain to greet guests at the hotel entrance. R&M Naturescape relied on Chicago-based pond builder/supplier Aquascape Designs (www.aquasapedesigns.com) for the basic design and materials to install and make the water features appear natural yet maintainable. Areas surrounding the water features are finished with collections of native bog plants.

The landscape company, which employed as many as 16 workers during peak construction last summer, will be

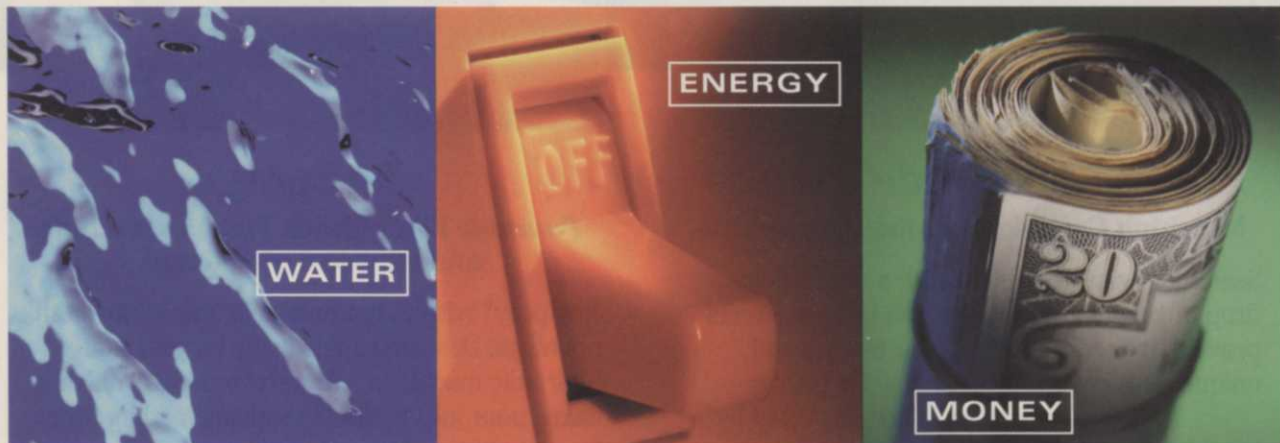
Running out of time: pregerminate

Realizing that winters come early in New England, R&M Naturescape pregerminated grass seed in 55-gallon plastic drums prior to hydroseeding the lawn at the Mountain View Grand Hotel. Roger Petite and his R&M Naturescape crew put the germinated seed down during the 2001 Labor Day weekend. He used a 300-gallon Turbo Turf hydroseeding unit rented from Dayton Supply in Maine.

Mark Sullivan, one of the partners in R&M Naturescape, said that he learned how to pregerminate seed by visiting the Web site www.turboturf.com. "It provided me with a lot of great information," he said. The company used a mixture of Kentucky bluegrass, perennial ryegrass and fescue seed (Catamont Supreme Mix from the Oliver Seed Co., Vermont) on the hotel site.

putting in finishing details and establishing gardens at the hotel until early July. Sullivan says that R&M Naturescape will seek to professionally

maintain the property, too. But no firm decision has been made about that, and Craffey says he may opt for in-house maintenance. **LJM**



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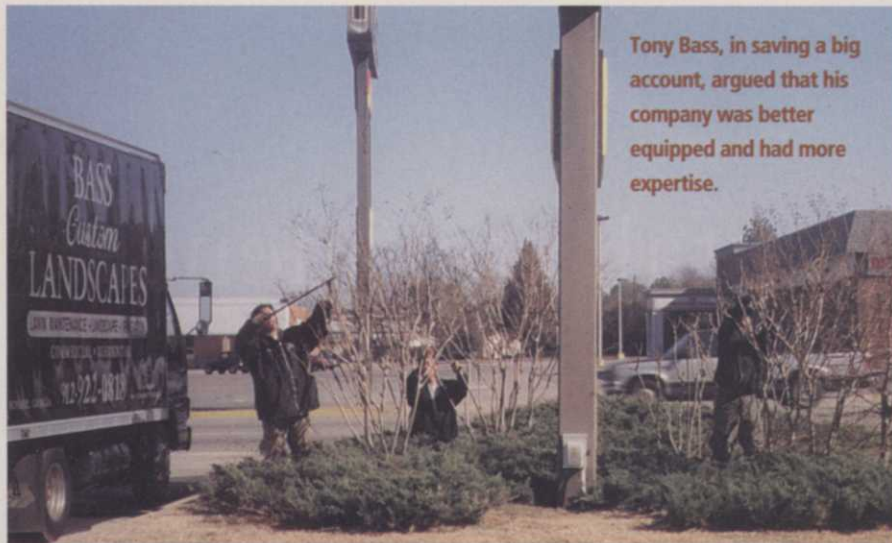
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OPERATIONS MANAGEMENT

The one that got away (almost)

This landscape company owner saved a big contract by crunching the numbers



Tony Bass, in saving a big account, argued that his company was better equipped and had more expertise.

BY JASON STAHL

There's lots of things that can cause a landscape or lawn care company owner to pull his or her hair out, but one of the most stressful has to be watching a big client cancel their contract with no explanation. That's what happened to Tony Bass, President of Bass Custom Landscapes, Bonaire, GA, last year.

The problem: big client cancels

Bass's client had experienced a tough year, and decided to cut the landscape operating budget. "It didn't make a lot of sense," Bass says. "They called and asked us to fax them a copy of their current contract, and two days later we get a fax from them saying

they were going to discontinue our services within 60 days."

Bass immediately called to find out what the client's goals were and to make sure his company hadn't done anything wrong. He was relieved to find out the problem wasn't his company, it was that the client wanted to save money. Still, Bass was perturbed.

"They said they estimated they could save money by bringing the work in-house," Bass says. "I reminded them that the reason they had hired my company was because it wasn't working out for them in-house. We were better equipment and had more expertise."

Still, Bass knew he had to do more than sweet-talk this client.

The solution: cost analysis

Bass decided to work up a detailed cost analysis with the client to figure out if the

client truly was going to save money by canceling the contract with him. Bass asked several questions, including:

- ▶ How many hours are allocated for maintenance each week?
- ▶ What is the average worker wage?
- ▶ What is the cost of your labor burden, specifically a benefits package?

"I told them how much it costs per hour to run a mower and an edger," Bass says. "As it turned out, there was only a \$5,000 difference between what I was getting paid and what the cost would be to them. Then I said, 'You haven't bought any flowers or mulch yet, and your savings are only \$5,000.'"

Then, Bass pointed out that the client still had a full-time person tractor mowing the large areas who had worked there a long time. "I told them that I knew they were loyal to him, but when we had sat down they had told me they wanted to save money," Bass says. "If that's your goal," I said, "then you need to give me the opportunity to price the whole property."

Bass concluded that it would only cost the client \$20,000 a year to add the other services. Two weeks later, the client signed a contract for an additional two years. The total savings to them was \$50,000.

"A simple conversation would have proved my case," says Bass, "but looking at the numbers in a clear, legible format helped."

Bass says he learned two lessons from his conversation with the client who almost walked: 1. Don't always think you can't salvage a contract, and 2. If people want to save money, figure out how to allow them to do it. **LJM**