

LAWNCAREPRO

LM'S OPERATOR OF THE MONTH » BY RON HALL



Darrel Nail takes care of the details. "He's a systems guy and thrives on staying abreast of what's the newest and the best," Gary LaScalea, the founder/owner of GroGreen Lawn Care, says of his vice president. "We're opposites in many respects, and I'm convinced that's why we've been successful." Nail shares what he learned from LaScalea to help him run a successful operation.

What led you into a career in lawn care? While I was in high school in Mississippi, I was a member of the FFA and worked for a local hay farmer. I worked for the Smith family for three years and really liked the farming. After graduating, I moved back to Tucson, AZ, and attended school. I moved to Dallas in 1982 and worked in fast food management, working 60 to 70 hours a week for not very much pay. In the spring of 1984, I applied for and got a job as a lawn care specialist with ChemLawn. I enjoyed being outside, seeing the results of treatments, talking with customers and educating them about turf care. I fell in love with the industry.

How and when did you join up with GroGreen and its owner, Gary LaScalea? In 1986, Gary LaScalea transferred to our ChemLawn branch as branch manager. As the company began to change, Gary took me under his wing, and I worked various management positions supporting his role as branch and regional manager. Even though we both went in different

directions for a short while, Gary and I stayed in touch. Jumping forward to October 1996, Gary, who had started GroGreen, his own company, a year earlier, asked me to help him implement his new software and computer system. That winter, we converted his customer base to the new software. In January 1997, he asked if I wanted to come and work with him. I sold my small mowing business and went back into lawn care.

Describe how your relationship with the company has changed.

Throughout my career with GroGreen, Gary and I have been very involved with the operation of the business. The first couple of years we spent most of our time out spraying lawns and returning to the office, usually to find a bunch of curled up faxes that had fallen to the floor. As the company grew, our roles matured — more employees,

more trucks, more training. Today, I oversee all company operations, training, customer service, employee relations and employee motivation. I also keep pushing for continuous improvement.

What do you like most about your job? What do you find most challenging? I get great satisfaction watching employees grow in their positions. I enjoy being part of a fast-paced, growing company, and helping it grow. The most challenging aspect of my job is staffing, especially the job of making decisions that affect employees and their families. That can be difficult.

In light of the economy, what kind of a spring is GroGreen having? We are having a good spring. The weather has been nice and we're doing better than last year. Last spring it warmed up; then got cold, and it took a long time for

AT A GLANCE

COMPANY: GroGreen Lawn Care, Plano, TX

FOUNDED: 1995

PRINCIPALS: Gary LaScalea, founder and owner; Darrel Nail, vice president and general manager

NUMBER OF OUTLETS: 2

EMPLOYEES: 30

SERVICES OFFERED: lawn care, tree and shrub care, pest control, aeration, grub control, fire ant control

BUSINESS OUTLOOK: "Regardless of competition or pricing issues, we're not going to backpedal on the quality of products or services."

FAMILY: Darrel is married to Debra; three children, Melissa, Rachael and Anthony; and two grandchildren, Anthony and Aiden

HOBBIES: trout fishing and riding his Harley-Davidson Ultra Classic

WEB SITE: www.grogreen.com

the grass to green up. I have a theory on lawn care and the economy: When the economy is depressed, people still want lawn care because it isn't a very big expense compared to other things they do to keep their properties looking nice.

THE MOST CHALLENGING ASPECT OF MY JOB IS STAFFING, ESPECIALLY THE NECESSARY JOB OF MAKING DIFFICULT DECISIONS."