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P R O V E N S O L U T I O N S



The SSI will change our industry

The Sustainable Sites Initiative (SSI) holds the potential to profoundly impact our professional landscaping industry. That's whether we install or maintain landscapes. That's whether the primary focus of our business operations is the greenery or hardscape side of the business.

The SSI is a voluntary rating system for the design, construction and maintenance of "sustainable" sites and landscapes. The quotation marks are mine. Obviously, the outdoor environments we install and maintain — and especially those that involve greenery — don't maintain or regenerate themselves. They're acceptable to our clients only through our efforts.

Accepting that, the goal of the SSI is to make practically the entire spectrum of landscapes affected by human activity more in tune with natural processes in terms of energy, water and materials use. The Initiative also seeks to improve and restore damaged landscapes and natural systems. Its purpose is laid out in its recently released, 233-page "*Guidelines and Performance Benchmarks 2009*."

The SSI has the support of industry groups, such as the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) and the American Society of Landscape Architects (ASLA), one of the partners, along with the Lady Bird Johnson Wildflower Center and the U.S. Botanic Garden, in the interdisciplinary effort.

The LEED impact

Because the scope of the Initiative is so broad, once it becomes part of Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) just about every aspect of our industry is likely to be affected.

Being part of LEED is a big deal for the SSI. That will almost guarantee its rapid spread as evi-

denced by the incredible adoption of LEED. Since its founding in 1998 by the U.S. Green Building Council, LEED now numbers more than 14,000 projects in at least 30 countries.

Getting our grades

LEED primarily focuses, of course, on providing standards for environmentally sustainable building construction — commercial, governmental, schools and residential. Critics (what few there are) have mostly focused on the portion of its rating system dealing with the properties that surround buildings, which the SSI seeks to address. It will essentially grade our industry's efforts in five major areas:

1. human health and well-being,
2. soils,
3. vegetation,
4. hydrology and
5. materials.

The SSI rating system works on a 250-credit scale. These credits can apply to projects ranging from home landscapes to commercial properties to public parks and beyond. Again, the scope of the Initiative is audacious.

Full SSI implementation as part of LEED is still some months away, but the positive buzz in the media and blogosphere regarding the rating system has been building since the unveiling of the new guidelines at this fall's ASLA Conference.

As you read this the SSI is collecting case studies, which will become part of the growing body of information supporting the program gathered these past five years.

Yes, participating in the Initiative will be "voluntary," but most of us realize soft policy eventually becomes hard policy. Get ready for it.

Don't be among those landscape pros who wake up one morning and find out that our industry has fundamentally shifted, and they're the only ones still offering services under the old models.

Stay on top of SSI. Visit www.sustainablesites.org so you're ready for what's coming.



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NEWS+VIEWS

GREEN INDUSTRY EVENTS, TRENDS AND TIPS

'Outdoor living' landscapes still a hot item with homeowners

BY RON HALL EDITOR-AT-LARGE

The good news for the landscape industry, despite the lack of new home construction, is homeowners are staying put and investing in their homes and properties. Many of them have money for improvements, and they want to use their properties for relaxation, intimate family gatherings and entertainment.

As a result, landscape companies that provided design/build services mostly for the new home market are shifting the focus of their construction activities to upgrades and renovations to existing residential landscapes.

Landscape professional David Schuster said property owners view their homes, including their yards, with an increased sense of appreciation and security ever since the terrorist attacks of 9/11. That trend is stronger yet because of the uncertainty in the current economy, said Schuster, speaking at the recent Green Industry Conference in Louisville.



A grill is one outdoor living offering.

Schuster and his wife, Heather, operate Terra-Firma Landscape, which they founded in Muskego, WI, 16 years ago. Their company specializes in residential design/build and commercial services-maintenance with annual sales approaching \$2 million.

While the size of landscape upgrades and renovations are usually smaller in scale and generate less

revenue than design/build projects for new homes, the demand for upgrades and renovations remains steady and offers contractors an opportunity to remain profitable and keep valuable employees busy, Schuster said.

"The most important thing is listening," Schuster said.

The options are limited only by a contractor's suggestions and a customer's budget, he said. Among the features clients can consider are seat walls, fire pits, pondless water features, spas, grills, refrigerators, built-in fireplaces, outdoor kitchens, LED lighting, mosquito misters, ceiling fans and radiant heaters, so property owners can enjoy their outdoor living even when conditions aren't ideal.

CLIPPINGS

A decade of excellence

DALLAS — Lambert Landscape Co. won one of three Decade Awards given at the national 40th Annual Environmental Improvement Awards Program sponsored by the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). The company also was one of six companies honored with an inaugural Sustainable Company Award. The Decade Award is given to a Professional Land Care Association of America (one of the forerunners to PLANET) legacy member that has managed a garden continuously for 10 or more years and that garden has won a Grand Award previously.

Supporting troops with music

NEW PRAGUE, MN — Project EverGreen and the Christmas SPIRIT Foundation created a 14-song Christmas CD of traditional favorites as a fund-raiser for two of the organizations' major programs: GreenCare for Troops and Trees for Troops, respectively. The CD, entitled "A Big EverGreen Christmas," is by Little Chicago, a band managed by Den Gardner, executive director of Project EverGreen. Gardner also plays percussion and sings in the band. The 12-piece band, based in New Prague, headquarters of Project EverGreen, produced the album as a volunteer project.

WORD ON THE STREET

"What was the toughest lesson you learned in 2009?"



"We learned when things were going well, we weren't monitoring our overhead expenses like we should have been. We cut \$400,000 in overhead this year. It's amazing how much waste we had. That \$400,000

was all bottom-line money we wasted. We hadn't bid our business insurance in two years, but we did so this year and saved \$100,000. We saved another \$50,000 in medical insurance by switching carriers, and we improved our employees' health coverage. The other \$250,000 in savings came from all the little things that add up."

— **Joel Hafner**, President/Owner, Fine Earth Landscape, Poolesville, MD



"This year, I had to let a good employee go because of the elimination of a position. The employee felt I hadn't done enough to try and save the position. I knew the employee was hurting emotionally, and I was an obvious target for his pain, but I took it personally when he failed to understand the budget cuts were out of my control and were necessary for us to stay afloat. The lesson I learned was I'm not just a grounds manager, I'm a people manager, too. I need to constantly tell and show my crew how much they're valued — because it's the right thing to do, the smart thing to do ... and it just might help lessen the harsh realities of this economy." — **Gary Ron**, Grounds Supervisor, Fountain Valley (CA) School District

"I know what I want to say, but I don't want it to be published! What I can say, on the record, is good will demonstrated in the past doesn't necessarily translate into good will for the present ... or for the future, for that matter. Everything changed this year. Good will and great work doesn't seem to matter as much as it used to matter. Today, the bottom line is all that matters."

— **Joe Unger**, President & CEO of The Lawn Ranger, Eden Prairie, MN

PHOTO COURTESY: TERRA-FIRMA LANDSCAPE

Briggs honored for saving energy

Briggs & Stratton continues its commitment to sustainability by being recognized by the state of Wisconsin and mobilizing a public-private partnership initiative.

At the Energy and Bottom Line Conference & Expo in Wisconsin Dells, WI, the company was presented with the prestigious Governor's Award for Excellence in Energy Efficiency. With the help of Focus on Energy, Wisconsin's energy efficiency and renewable energy initiative, Briggs & Stratton saved more than 5.5 million kWh of electricity annually; that's enough energy to power 557 homes for one year. The company also was recognized for upgrading more than 5,000 light fixtures to high-efficiency models and installing more than 2,500 occupancy sensors, just to name a few.

"It was an honor to receive this award," said Todd Teske, Briggs &

Stratton President & COO. "Briggs & Stratton's core value has always been to improve the lives of as many people as possible. We are committed to the principles of sustainability across the spectrum."

At the Midwest Industrial Energy Efficiency Exchange in Detroit, Briggs & Stratton was one of eight Wisconsin companies to sign a pledge with the Department of Energy to reduce the energy intensity (energy use per unit of output) of their respective companies by 25 percent or more during the next 10 years. The Save Energy Now initiative aims to catalyze significant energy and carbon reductions in the industrial sector.

"Signing this pledge was a continuation of the way Briggs & Stratton has operated for the past century," Teske said. "This pledge is just another example of our continued commitment."

BELIEVE IT OR NOT ...

MUIs?

Operating a riding mower under the influence of alcohol is no joke. Nevertheless, some just don't get it.

Waynesboro, VA, handyman Glenn Bowers has two riding mower-related driving under the influence (DUI) tickets. Bowers received his last DUI two years ago, heading home from a lawn job. Police pulled Bowers over after he ran through a stop on his Craftsman. Bowers failed a field sobriety test and blew a .024 (blood-alcohol content) in the breathalyzer.

Danforth Ross, a Vassalboro, ME, resident was arrested this summer returning from a beer run — rather than a lawn job. Because his driver's license was revoked already, Ross decided to ride his mower. Police pulled over the pattering dynamic duo shortly after they purchased two cases of clearly unneeded beer.



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Texas A&M irrigation engineers test subsurface drip systems

BY ROBERT BURNS

"If we can make it work here, we can make it work everywhere," said Dr. Guy Fipps, a Texas AgriLife Extension Service engineer in College Station.

Fipps wasn't singing about show biz in New York. Instead, he was talking about subsurface drip irrigation for turf.

Initial tests of subsurface drip irrigation systems by Texas AgriLife Extension Service engineers show 12-inch spacing between the lines works best during a drought.

Fipps and Charles Swanson, AgriLife Extension associate-urban irrigation, have been testing subsurface drip systems near the Medical School on the Texas A&M University campus since July 2008.

Originally, the test was designed to test subsurface systems in the area's heavy clay soils; but it turned out to be a test of the systems under drought conditions as well, Fipps said.

"We had 54 consecutive days without rain," he said.

The drought made one thing clear: "During droughts, there's no doubt you can't go greater than 1-foot spacing," Fipps said.

Subsurface drip irrigation is being promoted by irrigation companies as a potential water-saving alternative to conventional sprinkler systems.

"But the thing that's not well understood is how durable the drip irrigation is," Fipps said. "That is, how long it'll last under a typical landscape installation."

Several factors can affect the longevity of subsurface systems, including shrinkage and swelling of soils, and trash, particulates and minerals in the water.

Soil shrinkage and swelling can damage drip tape and fittings. Trash and other foreign matter in the lines can clog the small holes or emitters. Because the lines typically are buried 2 to 4 inches deep, repair can be expensive.

College Station was the ideal loca-



Tests show 12-in. spacing between lines works best during a drought.

tion for the test because the heavy clay soils shrink and expand as they dry out and become wet again, Fipps said. Also, the local water supply contains many particulates and minerals.

"In sandy soils, you won't have shrinkage and expanding as you do with clay soils," he said. "Also, many areas in Texas have better water quality. And we had a drought this summer, as everyone knows."

Fipps and Swanson tested eight drip irrigation products at different spacings of the drip lines. They also compared four systems with and without an installed back-flush feature, which allows one end of the line to be open to purge any trash and particulates. Drip tape and drip tubing with varying spacing of the drip emitters are being evaluated.

As of late October, there have been no problems with emitters clogging or with tears in the tubing. However, it appears that during dry periods, if there's inadequate irrigation, the soil will shrink and compact around the drip tubing, reducing and or preventing the free flow of water along the full length of the tubing, Fipps said.

"After installation, we had problems with the drip tubing being pulled out of the fittings connecting it to the supply pipelines, which could have been caused by any combination of soil shrinkage and swelling, fluctuations in pressure and improper installation," he said.

Fipps and his associates hope to continue the study for at least five years.

Dow adjusts pricing

INDIANAPOLIS —

Dimension specialty herbicide for control of crabgrass and broadleaf weeds is more cost-effective than ever. Based on challenging market dynamics, Dow AgroSciences has lowered the price on all formulations of the product, including Dimension 2EW, Dimension Ultra 40WP and Dimension on fertilizer. The company also has made price changes to Eagle 20EW specialty fungicide.

Honoring sustainable practices

TORONTO — A new Green for Life Award will be introduced at Congress 2010, and the winners will be announced Wednesday, Jan. 13, 2010, at Tailgate Party XIV. The Green for Life Award has been created to promote, recognize and reward environmentally responsible professionals in the horticultural, lawn and garden industry. Winners will be drawn from three industry sectors: contractor, landscape design/interior plantscape and lawn care/maintenance.

Syngenta extends world-wide reach

TEL AVIV, ISRAEL — Syngenta and Makhteshim Agan announced a long-term agreement in which Syngenta will supply Makhteshim Agan with its azoxystrobin fungicide. The agreement will offer growers a wider choice of products through the distribution channels of both companies. Syngenta will continue to expand the sales of its azoxystrobin-based fungicide products, while Makhteshim Agan will develop and commercialize its own range of products based on azoxystrobin, mainly in mixtures with its existing fungicide portfolio.

PEOPLE ON THE MOVE

Michael Garrett and **Michael Knight** joined **Converted Organics Inc.** as sales representatives for the U.S. Northeast and the U.S. Southeast. Before joining the company, Garrett was responsible for sales of organic fertilizers and soil conditioners to distributors and growers in California for Global Organics/Bioflora. Most recently, Knight was a district sales manager in the U.S. Southeast for The Toro Company and T-Systems International.

Schröder Lighting USA appointed **Mark J. Domzalski** to the newly created position of operations manager. Domzalski will direct the start-up and oversee the company's manufacturing facility and product development department. The new manufacturing facility is scheduled to open in January 2010. Domzalski will oversee the daily operations of the manufacturing facility, which is designed

to produce products for public, urban and industrial lighting applications domestically.

Mission Landscape Cos., promoted **Paul Wong** to vice president of Mission Landscape Architecture. Wong's new responsibilities include managing the daily operations, developing business, creating alliances and assisting with the strategic direction of the company. Wong was one of the founders of Irvine, CA-based Landarcwest, an award-winning landscape architectural and land planning firm, which was acquired by the Mission Landscape Companies.

SipcamAdvan appointed **Austin G. "Augie" Young** to the specialty products sales team in the Northeast region of the country. In addition to handling the turf and ornamental product line for the company, Young also will handle the pest management line of the wholly owned subsidiary Sostram Corp.

Austin Outdoor recently added Business Development Manager **JC Guillen** to its Orlando district staff. Guillen's responsibilities include working with clients and potential clients to realize their landscape needs and become a trusted partner as their landscape service provider. He will work closely with the company's business development team to provide timely submissions of comprehensive landscape management proposals that are responsive to client and property needs.

Ruppert Landscape promoted **Tommy Dimaio** to project manager in the company's North Carolina Landscape Construction Branch. Dimaio began with the company in 2006 in its Laytonsville office as a lead estimator. In his new position, for which he relocated to Charlotte, Dimaio is responsible for all aspects of the administration and installation of large or specialty landscape projects for a branch.

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BY **DANIEL G. JACOBS**
MANAGING EDITOR



SURVIVING THE SOCIAL EXPLOSION

Social media has the potential to deliver untold benefits to well-prepared businesses, but there are pitfalls for those who don't plan carefully.



ILLUSTRATION BY: ISTOCK INTERNATIONAL, INC.



THINK OF SOCIAL media like a game system — Xbox, Nintendo or PlayStation — that has been around since the early '80s. The games change, and the systems become more sophisticated, but the premise remains strong and increasingly popular. Like game systems that may have been a young person's game once, social media is expanding its reach rapidly.

It might seem easy to dismiss the trend as a time-wasting nuisance that will soon sit unused and forgotten as quickly as this year's must-have holiday toy. But social media isn't simply a new tool for business, although it certainly can and should be used to enhance your marketing efforts. Social media is the way an entire generation communicates. Few technological advances have been adopted so widely and quickly as the tools of social media.

How big is it? Twitter is the top word in 2009, surpassing Obama, H1N1 and stimulus, according to the Global Language Monitor.

Whether you're seeking customers or employees who'll serve them, Green Industry businesses need to update their statuses, blog their opinions, tweet their whereabouts and post their videos for clients, suppliers, employees and the community around them. Ignoring the social media explosion will limit growth opportunities and could erode operations. What makes social media compelling is that it's inexpensive, easy, real-time communication.

Many businesses are taking a cautious approach to social media, dipping their toes into the Internet pool to see if they want to swim.

"It was exploding all around us, and we

thought we might as well get one foot in this and see what it's all about before everyone is in it and we're behind the times," says Maria Candler, president of James River Grounds Management in Richmond, VA.

The basics

There's no one tool that encompasses all social media. The most well known tools are Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and blogs. Each has its unique role in the social media spectrum.

Knowing how your customers use social media is the key to taking advantage of what it has to offer. Like any business plan, you need to know the demographics. Knowing where your customers congregate is a good start.

Each social network — Facebook, Twitter, YouTube, etc. — has different demographics. You have to understand where your qualified audience interacts socially, says Judith Guido, owner of Guido & Associates in Moorpark, CA.

That's been a challenge for James River Grounds Management.

"We're having a difficult time thinking about how we could get our Facebook content in the hands of our customers regularly," Candler says. "Maybe that's the end result, but we're trying to figure out how that would make sense. What do they care about that would make them go to the page? They don't even read the e-newsletter."

Getting started in social media isn't difficult. It's as simple as signing up at one of the various sites to begin expressing yourself. While there are dozens of sites to choose from, if you're going to start with just one, you probably want to create a Facebook account, Guido suggests. Facebook has the status-update element that has made Twitter so popular. It also allows you to create a community and post photos. No matter where you go virtually, having a strategy in place is key.

Lack of planning is a significant problem, Guido says. Fully leveraging social media is no different than marketing or sales. Proper execution requires planning.

"You need to craft a strategy for social media," she says. "I can't emphasize that enough."

Creating interest

Scott Parker, owner of Parker Homescape in Fanwood, NJ, created his Facebook page in

“It's one of the most exciting tools in business. It creates a **COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE** at low cost or no cost, almost instantaneously.”

— JUDITH GUIDO, OWNER
GUIDO & ASSOCIATES



early 2008. Currently, the company has 306 friends, all of whom can view photos of the company's completed work and read about recent awards Parker Homescape has received.

"It allows you to have a forum where you gather all your friends, and you can let all your friends know what you do for a living," Parker says. "It allows you to get your name out there, have people know exactly what you do, and keep in touch with people."

Parker likens the friendly nature of social networking to highly desirable word-of-mouth advertising.

"It's a soft sell," he says. "These are people who know you. If someone doesn't know you, they have a friend who knows you. It's automatic trust."

That sense of community is important.

"We're trying to build awareness around something," says Dennis Dougherty, president and CEO of Cagwin and Dorward in Novato, CA. "How else would you build awareness? We'd send out letters and brochures. We'd spend a lot of time creating that. As a consumer, I read the first two or three sentences, and if it doesn't captivate me, it goes right into the recycling bin."



Parker Homescape's Facebook page allows people to view photos of the company's completed work.

Social networks can provide interest because it's multifaceted with different points of view.

"If you don't capture somebody's imagination with information that's posted by the company, another person can post something, and it captivates everybody, and they talk about it," Dougherty says.

Double-edged sword

Despite all of the benefits of social media, it's not ideal. Like all tools, social media can sidetrack people. Besides providing an extraordinary tug away from job responsibilities, there's the concern social networking could replace the all-important, face-to-face element of conducting business.

If someone doesn't know you, they have a friend who knows you.
IT'S AUTOMATIC TRUST.

— SCOTT PARKER, OWNER
PARKER HOMESCAPE



MAKE THE MOST OUT OF SOCIAL MEDIA

BY JEFF KORHAN

Social media is a platform for interacting and engaging with people to make friends and build relationships that may create opportunities for your business. Unlike traditional marketing and selling, business is a by-product of new media marketing. Here are some tips to help you be more effective.

1 Devote at least one-third of your social media marketing to listening and learning. Use Google Alerts to monitor your company brand, personal reputation and industry specialty.

2 Always use a personal photo for your profile, as opposed to an avatar or business logo. Your personal reputation arguably is more important than your company brand.

3 Standardize your usernames and profiles. Use namechk.com or knowem.com to search dozens of net-

works for availability. Claim your username on these sites for future use.

4 A blog is the cornerstone of your social media presence. Use it to distinguish your unique value for your customers and prospects by helping them solve problems and make better decisions that pertain to your area of specialty.

5 Google indexes most of the messaging on the Web to provide relevant information for Internet searches. If your communications are embedded with the key words your customers are using, they're like bread-crumbs that lead new prospects to you.

6 Multimedia content is essential for making your information consumable by the largest audience. Search YouTube.com for instructional videos about how use video, images, and links to make your communications come alive.

7 Social media amplifies everything about you and your business with amazing accuracy. If you try to spin your reputation or capabilities, you'll more than likely fail.

8 Sharing is the grease that makes social media work. You have to become comfortable with giving, because without it, there's no reason for anyone to link up to you on the social networks.

Jeff Korhan is new media marketer who helps entrepreneurs implement online strategies that maximize Web visibility, reputation, and referrals. He blogs at <http://jeffkorhan.com>.



ILLUSTRATION BY: ISTOCK INTERNATIONAL INC.



Cagwin and Dorward are trying build a sense of community and awareness.

James River Grounds Management purchased smart phones for its team to provide access to social

networks. But it wasn't an easy decision.

"It makes it too easy to send e-mails instead of forcing them to get in front of customers and maintain more personal connections, which we, as a relationship company, are all about," Candler says. "We have a lot of heartburn about that decision."

However, as useful as a social network is, it's still a tool that, if not used properly, could lose its effectiveness.

"My only concern there — and I've seen this happen in other social networks — is various people will join, and they're not interested in what's going on," Dougherty says. "They're trying to get people to go someplace else and look at whatever they're selling, which probably isn't landscaping."

On your own

While Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn and YouTube are the big players in social media, they are, by no means, the only ways to reach your audience.

Dougherty created his own social network using the Ning Network, a service that allows people to join and create their own social platforms. As of early December, there were more than 1.8 million Ning Networks and 37 million registered users.

Dougherty created his network following a World Café (www.worldcafe.com) meeting to talk about resources used in landscapes.

"It's difficult to get people to move to sustainable landscape practices if they don't know the reasons they should do it," Dougherty says. "We were involved in the World Café, which essentially is people conversing all day around small tables. It was powerful. If you were there, you would have walked away on your toes. It was energetic."

But knowing the enthusiasm generated during a one-day event would quickly subside, Dougherty employed the Ning Network (www.ning.com) to encourage ongoing discussion.

"It's important to keep the conversation alive," he says. "Initially, people come out of them, and they're gleeful. They seem to have direction. But as every day ticks on, those memories fade. The neat thing about social media is, if they go back and check in, it rekindles their thinking about why they were there and what they were doing. I'm hoping that will give longer shelf-life to our strategic meetings and direction."

Overcoming skepticism

Dougherty admits he was skeptical before embracing the concept.

"Initially, when people brought this idea of social media up — and it was brought up a couple of times at various meetings — my initial reaction was 'No, it's going to be a time-waster,'" he says. "And I didn't want to have to learn something new. There are so many things you have to accomplish each day."

But once Dougherty gave it a try, he realized how easy and useful it could be.

Dougherty wants people of interest joining.

"The people who are invited in can invite other people to join," he says. "It's open in the sense concerned people can be invited in by any of the members."

Cagwin and Dorward may open the community to anyone, but at that point, it likely would need a full-time administrator.

The question for landscape companies about social media isn't whether to get involved or when, it's to what extent should they get involved and how will that involvement be managed.

"It's one of the most exciting tools in business," Guido says. "I could post something, and in 15 minutes, I can have a group of 15,000 targeted people responding to a bit of information or research.

It creates a competitive advantage at low cost or no cost, almost instantaneously. We thought the Internet was the greatest. This takes the Internet to the nth degree to create a razor-targeted group of qualified people you want to be in front of." **LM**

It makes it
**TOO EASY TO
SEND E-MAILS**

instead of forcing
them to get in front
of customers ..."

— MARIA CANDLER,
PRESIDENT, JAMES RIVER
GROUNDS MANAGEMENT





THE BENCHMARK

KEVIN KEHOE

The author is the owner-manager of 3PG Consulting. Contact him at kkehoe@earthlink.net.

10 tips to taking the offensive in 2010

It's time to shift your business focus from defense to offense. Reducing costs is essential, but the easy cuts already have been made. Additional cuts probably will slice into muscle and bone.

And, as anyone can tell you, cost cutting isn't motivational. Taking the offensive is much more uplifting. More than ever, revenue growth and cash management are essential to your success, given the realities of slow-paying customers, lower prices, and stingy banks and vendors.

Here are 10 tips to taking the offensive in 2010:

- 1. Obsess about your accounts receivable.** Review your aging reports every day and place reminder calls to your customers. Start at 15 days, get deposits where you can, and invoice each job the day the work is completed.
- 2. No one gets raises.** Tell your employees you have a plan that can keep them happily employed, but there won't be raises until the clouds lift.
- 3. Spend more on marketing.** Use door hangers, direct mail and e-mail blasts. Send a message outlining money-saving solutions to landscape problems. Do this every month. Out of sight equals out of mind. Simple, helpful and frequent "touches" are a key to lead generation.
- 4. Get out and sell.** Passive selling is not an option. Customers won't beat down your door — you have to beat down theirs, particularly in this economy. Yes, you, the owner, must prospect and make calls or find someone who will.
- 5. Work on lower pricing.** We're in deflationary times. Worry less about gross profit percentage and

more about selling enough gross profit dollars to pay for overhead every month.

6. Communicate with your customers — past and present. Other contractors are calling on your customers. Because there's little loyalty out there, you must defend your turf. Meet with your customers and ask them, "How can we add value for you and help you in this economy?"

7. Expand the services you offer. Offer more services to your customer base. Customer spending next year will have an ROI emphasis. Saving money, reducing risk and being eco-friendly (as long as it contributes to realizing the first two) top the list of potential upsells.

8. Keep your banker and vendors in the loop. You'll need credit to fund growth. Put together a budget and cash-flow forecast, then meet with these people to re-establish credit facilities and terms for 2010.

9. Clean house. This may sound harsh, but now is a good time to get rid of C players. Cleaning house has three virtuous effects: First, morale improves; second, A and B players can make more money picking up the slack; and third, you'll sleep better.

10. Look for a diamond in the rough. There are talented people looking for work. If you must focus on sales, you'll need to add talent in operations. It costs nothing to advertise on Craig's List, and everyone looking for work eventually looks there. When you find a diamond, hire him/her even if it costs more than what you're used to paying. Good people pay their way.

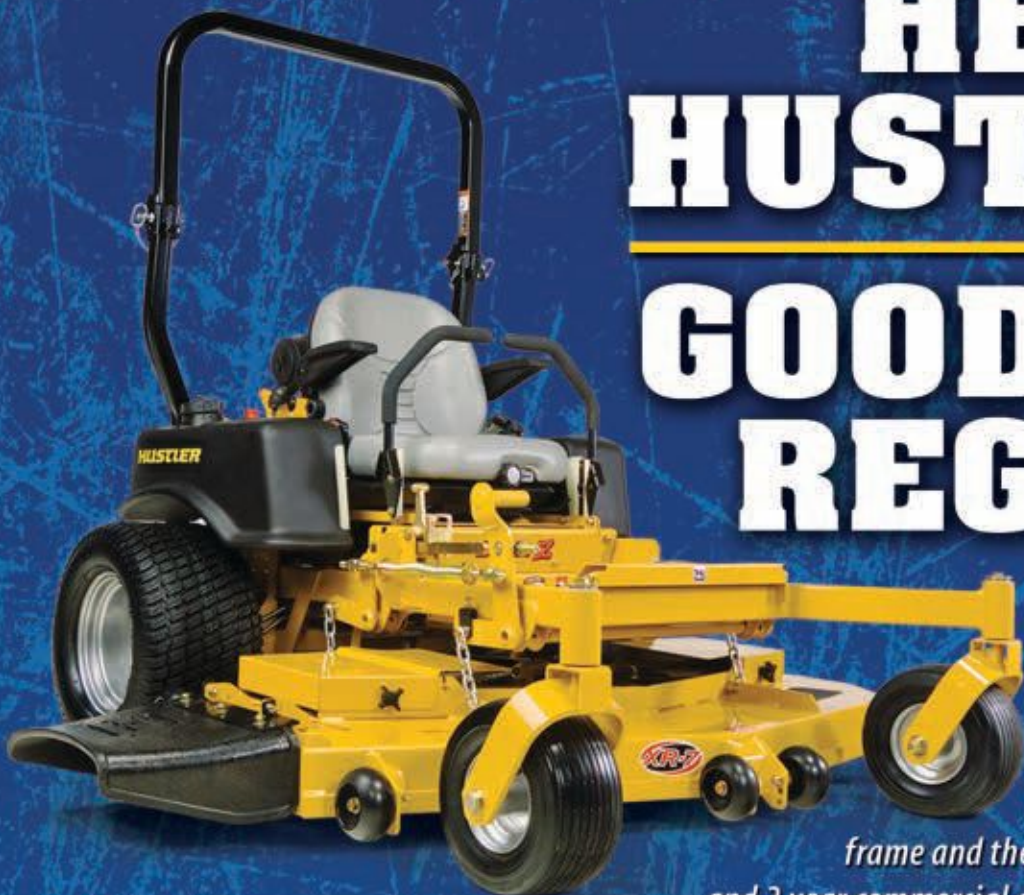
The old rules of the game are gone forever. We're entering into uncharted territory. These 10 ideas can help you take the offensive — so you can get off your heels and get back on your toes.

I'm reminded of my former football coach whose every pre-game pep talk was a variation on the same theme: "Boys, let's do it to them before they do it to us." That's where we are in this economy. The world is presenting business owners with a clear choice — hang onto the past or leap into the future. It's time to play offense.

The world is presenting business owners with a **clear choice** — hang onto the past or leap into the future.

HELLO HUSTLER

GOODBYE REGRET



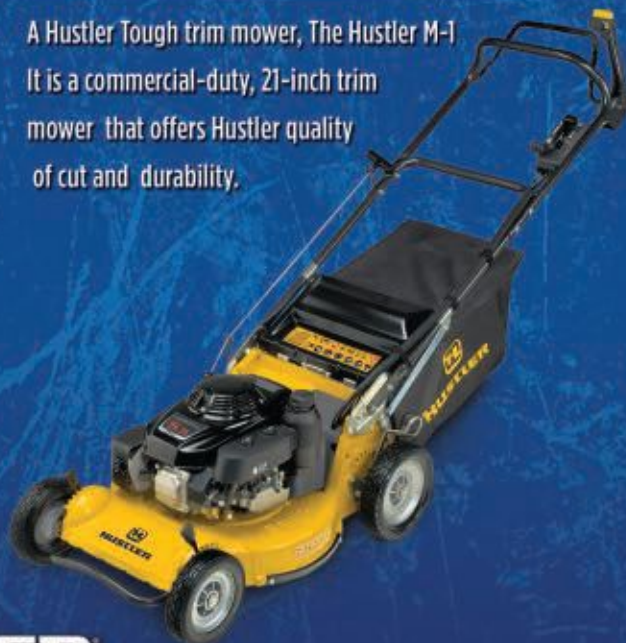
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Several years after forming his lawn care company in 1989, **Brent A. Flory** participated on a panel at the first-ever Green Industry Conference, sharing his experiences with natural, biological products and practices. Today, he and his wife run a million-dollar-plus, full-service company in Delphi, IN.

How has your agricultural background and belief in natural processes for plant health care shaped your approach to turf care and landscape services. I raised acres of truck crops sold wholesale and ran into many difficulties with soil and plant conditions related to soil conditions. Through this, I became involved in the agriculture fertilizer and consulting business.

I developed a strong belief in natural soil amendments and fertilizing techniques, including a biological approach to soil and plant health. Many of these ideas have influenced my approach to lawn care and management. I became an advocate of using aerobically formed compost. This is the cornerstone of my approach to turf and soil health.

Which of your services have been affected most by the recession and which have been affected least. Construction, irrigation and landscaping have declined significantly. People seem to be spending money on primary maintenance services.

What changes do you plan to make for the coming season?

Changes are focused on pricing services, improving efficiency with those services and reducing overhead. This means working for less money in some service areas. We want improved efficiency and better managed overhead to help offset less gross dollars. This will mean being more productive in the field and extra hours for management. Our goal is not to reduce jobs for our employees.

What are the biggest changes since the company's founding?

There's greater awareness and emphasis on landscape. People are turning their back yards into beautiful back lawns. A second difference is the increase of service companies providing maintenance services.

What do you foresee in 2010?

I'm optimistic. We changed

our pricing structure and picked up nice, new properties. We're going to have to work harder and do a bit more, but we're looking forward to a profitable year.

If you had it to do over again, what would you do differently?

Finding good people, for growth and solid business from the start. I'd have spent more time and money on personnel. This is much easier said than done. Good people are the key to growth and business. As long as the population grows, there are new job opportunities and people required for this industry. There's never enough experienced people. So, there's always a need for training and recruiting. The search never stops for good people, even when you're fully staffed. It has been a difficult process to cash flow a business, find good people and grow at the same time.

AT A GLANCE

COMPANY: Freedom Lawns, Inc., Delphi, IN

FOUNDED: 1989

OWNERS: Brent and Marilyn Flory

NUMBER OF LOCATIONS: One

EMPLOYEES: 25 to 35

SERVICES: Mowing, fertilization, weed control, pruning, mulching, landscape construction, paver patio/walk installation, irrigation install/maintenance, water gardens, landscape lighting, retaining walls, Bush Hog, vegetation control, snow removal

INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT: PLANET, Tippecanoe Apartment Association, Midwest Regional Turfgrass Foundation, Snow & Ice Management Association

PERSONAL HIGHLIGHTS/HOBBIES: Piloting his four-passenger Beechcraft, motorcycling, weight training, spending time with family and friends

FAMILY: Five grown children, one grandchild

WEBSITE: FreedomLawns.com

“ I BECAME AN ADVOCATE OF USING **AEROBICALLY FORMED COMPOST**. THIS IS THE CORNERSTONE OF MY APPROACH TO TURF AND SOIL HEALTH.”



You have enough things to worry about. But with **FreeHand® 1.75G herbicide**, early re-treats aren't one of them. **FreeHand 1.75G** enables you to get up to 8 weeks of broad-spectrum, preemergent weed control. And since **FreeHand 1.75G** utilizes two highly effective active ingredients and two unique modes of action, it's a great resistance management tool, too. Don't lose profits to re-treats. Treat it right the first time, with **FreeHand 1.75G**.

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The Chemical Company

DISCOVERING A 'GREEN' MINE

BY **MARTY WHITFORD**
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Bayer and North Carolina State University are collaborating on a plethora of plant health research projects. One look in the mirror behind NCSU doctoral student Shannon Sermons reflects the pack of trade media reporters who toured NCSU's phytotron during Bayer Environmental Science's inaugural Plant Health Symposium, held Nov. 10-11 in Raleigh and Clayton, NC.

Bayer Environmental Science's first-ever Plant Health Symposium brings together landscapers, golf course superintendents, academia and trade media to discuss the key roles of turfgrass, trees and plants in sustainability, and related research, testing tools and formulations.

FIRST, BAYER PLANTS the seeds. Then it plants the trees.

"Sustainability has long been a way of life for us at Bayer — but now we're sharing more, regarding our key role in environmental stewardship, through endeavors such as this Symposium," said Nick Hamon, Bayer Environmental Science's vice president of product development and sustainable development.

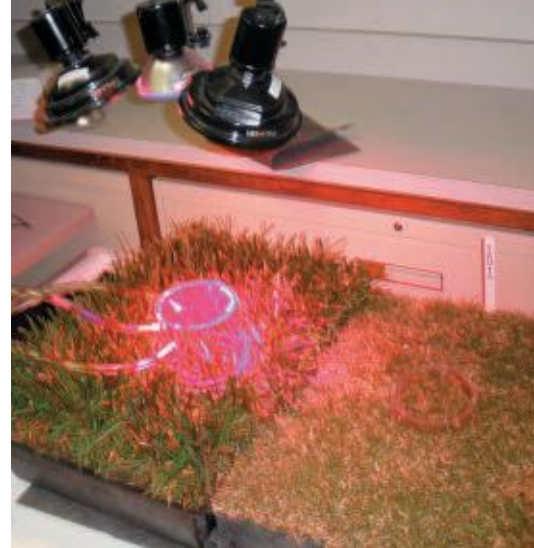
"As you can tell by my title, for Bayer, product development and sustainability go hand in hand," noted Hamon during a beverage break at Bayer Environmental Science's inaugural Plant Health Symposium, held in Raleigh and Clayton, NC, Nov. 10-11. "This Symposium will help us collaborate, innovate and educate. Today and tomorrow, we're planting more seeds to sustainability. After the Symposium concludes, we'll plant a few more trees to offset our carbon footprint from this meeting."

A group of about 25 landscapers, golf course superintendents, North Carolina

State University (NCSU) "turf doctors," trade magazine editors and Bayer Environmental Science team members comprised the Symposium's participant mix.

Healthy, well-maintained green spaces with turfgrass, trees and plants, can work wonders to decrease erosion, buffer noise, reuse water, promote biodiversity, sequester carbon and cool outdoor temperatures, noted Dr. Tom Rufty, director of the Center for Turfgrass Environmental Research and Education and professor of environmental plant physiology, NCSU's Department of Crop Science.

Dr. Rufty noted the world already is grappling with limited oil and water resources and significant climate shifts — and he, Hamon and other Symposium speakers suspect carbon output caps and credits similar to those already adopted by the European Union soon might be *mandated* in the United States. Further demanding more-sustainable practices, the world's population is projected to



An infrared gas analyzer tests the carbon sequestration capabilities of tall fescue (left) and bermudagrass (right) at Bayer's Clayton (NC) Development & Training Center.

mushroom from about 6.9 billion people today to 9.2 billion by 2050.

"As countries like China and India continue to industrialize and grow, resources are going to become more costly and less available," said Dr. Rufty,

continued on page 21

ALL PHOTOS BY: MARTY WHITFORD

A festive holiday advertisement. The background is a dark blue night sky with stars and a full moon. Santa Claus, dressed in his traditional red and white suit, is riding a yellow and black lawnmower. The lawnmower is loaded with several wrapped gifts. The text "Happy Holidays!" is written in a large, white, cursive font at the top left. At the bottom left, it says "Wishing our customers a Prosperous New Year!" in a similar cursive font. In the bottom right corner, there is a red circular logo with a white "Z" and the words "Z-SPRAY" and "Z-FLUID" around it. Next to the logo, it says "from your friends at L.T. Rich Products" and provides the website "www.zspray.com" and phone number "(877) 482-2040".

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PERFECTION
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RESULT.

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4-Speed™ XT.”

Eric Larson, Green Systems Turf Management
Site: Astor's Mansion
Newport, Rhode Island

With contracts for many of the world's most famous mansions, Eric Larson faces customer expectations that are as high as the real estate prices. So when ground ivy, clover and other tough weeds started showing up, he turned to 4-Speed XT. Its combination of four active ingredients makes weeds 'Deader. Faster.' For more on 4-Speed herbicide brands, and more of Eric Larson's story, go to www.nufarm.com/us.

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www.nufarm.com/us

GREEN MINE

NCSU's Dr. Tom Ruffy and Dr. Danesha Carley showcase the university's 18-hole public golf course opened in June. Crafted by Lonnie Poole Golf Course — Arnold Palmer's design group — the course relies on solutions donated by Bayer Environmental Science to control turf weeds, diseases and pest insects.



continued from page 19

recently named the first Bayer Environmental Science Professor of Sustainable Development, a chair endowed by the Bayer CropScience business unit. “Ready or not, like it or not, we are challenged with using our resources much more efficiently and better protecting our environment — while maintaining the quality of life we value so much.”

Nurturing green spaces

Dr. Ruffy noted 1 hectare (2.47 acres) of healthy turfgrass can sequester 1 ton of carbon emissions annually. The United States is home to up to 60 million acres of turf, capable of storing a combined 24 million tons of carbon each year. Healthy trees reportedly store another 3,200 lbs. of carbon per acre annually.

Lawn care chemicals help combat turf weeds, diseases, pest insects, and heat and water stress. They are part of the solution — not the problem, Dr. Ruffy said. These Green Industry innovations help protect our turf and, in turn, our ability to sequester carbon and keep temperatures from rising higher than the 6- to 7-degree climb already projected by some scientists to occur in the coming decades.

“There are a lot of misperceptions about lawn care chemicals,” Dr. Ruffy explained. “For instance, our research shows very little leaching with pesticides on turfgrass. Pesticides last five to 10 times longer in agricultural settings.”

In addition to carbon sequestration, turfgrass rapidly is becoming a key effluent dispersal solution. As populations bloom and fresh water supplies dwindle

across the globe, intelligent irrigation on green spaces increasingly will incorporate the reuse of “gray water.” However, Dr. Ruffy noted some studies have shown an increased need for fungicides in such cases to ward off heightened vulnerability to dollar spot and other diseases. More studies need to be conducted, but there also might be a greater need for weed and pest control solutions on effluent-irrigated turf.

Turf research central

Bayer's Development and Training Center is a 280-acre research site in Clayton featuring four golf course holes, a number of 20,000-sq.-ft. “super greens” and more than 50 types of cultivars used for testing sustainable turf solutions under an array of stress scenarios.

“We're located in the transition zone: We can work with warm- and cool-season turf,” said John Rock, manager of technical information for Bayer's Clayton D&T Center. “Neither type is extremely happy here, but that's a benefit to us as we test the stress tolerance of various turf types.”

“We joke that we can grow every single type of turf here — but badly,” Hamon chimed in.

“And my home lawn testifies to that,” Rock added.

Bayer's Clayton D&T Center also houses an 8-acre ornamentals nursery.

“We recently added a chain-linked fence around the nursery because it had become quite the salad buffet for deer,” Rock said.

The Center also serves as a proving grounds for all types of John Deere equipment.

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1.3 oz/1,000 sf of 4-Speed XT plus spreader-sticker (1 oz/gallon finished spray)

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LT Rich Z-Sprayer, 1/3 gal spray tips

TIMING:

July 13, 2009

SUMMARY:

“This was not ideal herbicide application timing for ground ivy control, but we still had great results on it and all the other weeds on the 4-Speed XT label. As a result, we saved several contracts. We'll be using a lot more 4-Speed XT and other Nufarm products in the future.”

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GREEN MINE

Participants in Bayer Environmental Science's first-ever Plant Health Symposium survey NCSU's outdoor turf lab spanning more than 24 acres. Approximately 6 acres have been added for NCSU's new turf breeding program.



Dr. David Spak, Bayer Environmental Science's herbicide lead – product development, shares how Bayer is leveraging GPS and radiometer technologies to measure and digitally map plant health.



Bayer's close collaboration with NCSU gives the partnership access to:

- The vast Clayton D&T Center, where staffers deploy technologies such as an infrared gas analyzer gauging the carbon sequestration of different turf types, and a GPS-radiometer tech duo that allows easy measurement and digital mapping of plant health;
- NCSU's outdoor turf lab, spanning more than 24 acres; 6 acres recently were added to accommodate a new turf breeding program;
- NCSU's phytotron featuring more than 70 environmental chambers for testing plant health under various controlled conditions; and
- NCSU's 18-hole public golf course, which opened in June and relies on a host of Bayer Environmental Science's Green Business solutions to sustain plant health.

Symposium participants received backstage passes to tour all of the facilities.



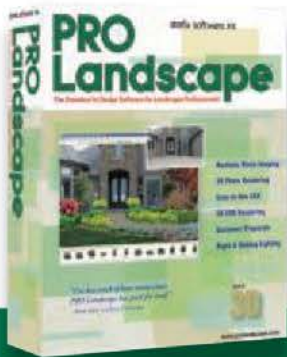
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Forward acting

According to Bayer Environmental Science, much of it boils down to:

1. **Sustainable Development** — "A commitment to living and conducting business in a way that meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs."
2. **Greening and Growing** — "Managing

harmful plants and pests while improving plant health, and contributing to the well-being of people and the quality of their urban and recreational environments.”

3. Together with Nature — “Reducing our footprint and fostering environmental stewardship” through, among other practices:

- Manufacturing processes that reuse water and reduce greenhouse gas emissions and freight;
- Packaging that incorporates more recycled content; and
- The development of new technologies featuring low-dose active ingredients, more-targeted applications and integrated pest management (IPM).

Bayer Environmental Science’s commitment to sustainability has yielded myriad advances.

“We recently received registration for Celsius, our newest post-emergent herbicide that attacks weeds through their shoots and roots,” noted Matt Bradley, Bayer Environmental Science’s herbicides marketing product manager. “The development of Celsius required a significant investment, but it paid off with a new formulation for warm-season turf that combines three active ingredients to achieve improved weed control with 25% to 75% less active ingredient.”

StressGard is another gem discovered during “green” mining, noted Richard Rees, Bayer Environmental Science’s fungicides product development manager. Incorporated within several Bayer Environmental Science turf management solutions, StressGard protects against environmental stress and disease, while improving turf quality and overall plant health.

Bayer Environmental Science has made sustainability — namely,

Neil Cleveland, Bayer Environmental Science’s director of Green Business, discusses the Green Industry’s role in “providing great places for people to live, work and play.”

“Protecting Tomorrow ... Today” — the primary principle behind its strategic, operational and cultural activities, said Neil Cleveland, director of Bayer Environmental Science’s Green Business.

“Bayer Environmental Science’s CEO, Pascal Housset, has great vision,”

Cleveland noted. “Years ago, Pascal said, ‘We need to move from killing stuff — weeds, diseases and pest insects — to greening and growing.’ And, today, that’s precisely what Bayer Environmental Science and this Plant Health Symposium are all about.” ■■



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T-60/75*



T-90/120*



T-170



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BESTPRACTICES

BRUCE WILSON

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Reevaluate capital investments

As landscape contractors, we don't look at the use of capital as part of our decision making. Sure, we worry about meeting payroll and cash flow, but at the same time, we make capital purchases and don't always evaluate thoroughly whether we're investing that capital wisely or making the best use of it. This recession probably has made many contractors dust off the balance sheet and begin to use it as a tool to measure overall business health. The banks and bonding companies are looking at financing more closely today, causing companies to take a harder look at debt and cash reserves.

Equipment purchases consume a large portion of landscape companies' capital. Unlike some capital purchases, such as those for facility equipment, some purchases can be a variable cost to a degree.

This is an expansive subject, but for now, I'm focusing on equipment purchasing decisions. Generally, we purchase equipment to reduce labor costs and perform work we're paid to do — mow, blow, edge and clean up. Many contractors love equipment and, in many instances, have strong opinions about it.

Contractors have developed practices of assigning equipment to single crews to discourage problems associated with abuse and instill pride of ownership. They like to equip all their crews with a similar palate of equipment because it's easy to manage. These aren't bad practices. In fact, I

espouse some of them in principle. However, as we're all trying to figure out how to make money in a price-driven market, it's time to test all assumptions. The easy, safe way of managing just may not be affordable.

Furthermore, maintenance programs are put in place to care for equipment that's more schedule based (day of week or interval of time) instead of running hours of the equipment.

We're in an unprecedented era of price cutting in the market that's starting to compress everyone's margins. Prices are unlikely to increase soon, so it's time to look anywhere and everywhere for margin savings and capital preservation.

One untapped area is equipment usage. If hour meters were used to evaluate use time of a piece of equipment, we'd find we have equipment in all our fleets that could allow us to do much more work without additional capital investment.

Most likely, that work would involve sharing equipment between crews, scheduling, an increased focus on preventive maintenance, etc., but it could allow companies to grow out of this recession with less capital investment. It could allow contractors to retire debt without taking on new debt. It could accomplish efficiency gains that would allow contractors to regain some of the margins they sacrifice with low prices.

In addition to equipment sharing, another concept that has been bantered about, but usually not implemented, is running split shifts, which could extend the use of equipment from 4 to 5 days to 6 to 7 days. When you start thinking like this, it opens unique opportunities to work on properties that aren't open for business, making it more favorable to work with less interruption or interference. This scenario creates management challenges, but trying to compete today within the old framework is challenging enough.

So, while it tests common practices, it might be time to look at equipment management and usage in a different way in a different world.

We ... don't always evaluate thoroughly whether we're **investing ... capital wisely** or making the best use of it.



High-Tech holiday gifts

Why not celebrate the holidays by buying a few technology gadgets for your employees, your business and yourself? This month, I've collected information on a number of innovative products that are fun and useful:

Dell Latitude XT2 XFR | dell.com

Are your field-service employees rough on gear? Use this rugged laptop to digitize your field operations without worrying about broken hardware and expensive repair services. The XT2 features a capacitive multitouch screen (think iPhone), an EVDO wireless broadband Internet connection and a solid-state disk drive with full disk encryption. With its backlit rubber sealed keyboard, this laptop is ready for even the dirtiest environment. Or, you can turn the 12.1-in. touch screen around and use it as a tablet for taking notes and other handwritten applications.

Sprint HTC Hero | sprint.com

With the success of Apple's iPhone, Google now has a big push into the mobile phone market with its second generation of Android phones. The first to be offered by Sprint is the HTC Hero, which has everything the modern smart phone needs and more. From the 5-megapixel camera that also functions as a camcorder, to the built-in GPS, magnetic compass and accelerometer, you can be sure to have all of the functionality you've come to expect from a mobile phone.

And just like the iPhone, neat applications are readily available from the Android Market. As an added plus, because its software is from Google, HTC Hero works with all of your favorite Google applications and social networks.

WikiReader | thewikireader.com

Tired of losing arguments because you don't know the facts? Well, that doesn't need to happen any longer with the WikiReader in your pocket. This

easy-to-use device puts all 3 million-plus articles found on the popular online encyclopedia Wikipedia in the palm of your hand.

The WikiReader sports a high-quality touch screen and the ability to serve all of the content *without* an Internet connection. By using a microSD card for storage, you can update the content via a free download on your desktop computer or sign up for a twice-a-year mail order subscription service. Use it for in-depth research or light reading. Either way, having the sum of all human knowledge is a bit easier now.

Optoma Pico PK102 Pocket Projector

| optomausa.com

Building the perfect PowerPoint sales presentation will close the deal — only if your customer can see it. With the Pico PK102 Pocket Projector, you can create images as large as 60-in. and audio anywhere you are. The portable, lightweight and rechargeable projector has 4GB of internal memory, so you won't even need a PC to view 6,000 pictures or eight hours of video. And with the LED light source, a burned out bulb is a thing of the past. This projector is the ideal companion for any road warrior.

One of the best parts of the holiday season involves finding the perfect gift. Putting the right technology into your employees' hands, should increase productivity and sales. What business owner wouldn't want that gift this holiday season?

Putting the right technology into your employees' hands, should **increase productivity and sales.** What business owner wouldn't want that gift this holiday season?

PROJECT PORTFOLIO

A SCRAPBOOK OF DESIGN/BUILD OVERHAULS

Landscaping in new heights

THE MISSION

A rooftop terrace by New York-based Town and Gardens Ltd. derives its inspiration from where the Manhattan winds blow and the movement of the Hudson River.

With a budget of less than \$500,000, Town and Gardens' landscape design and installation was completed on schedule — and was well received by the client, residents and architect.

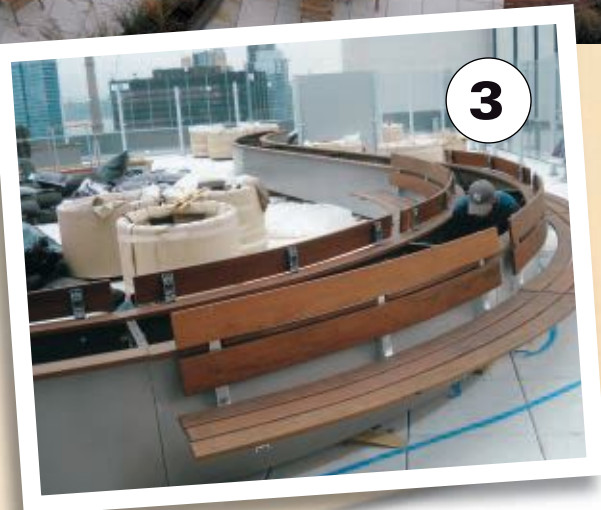
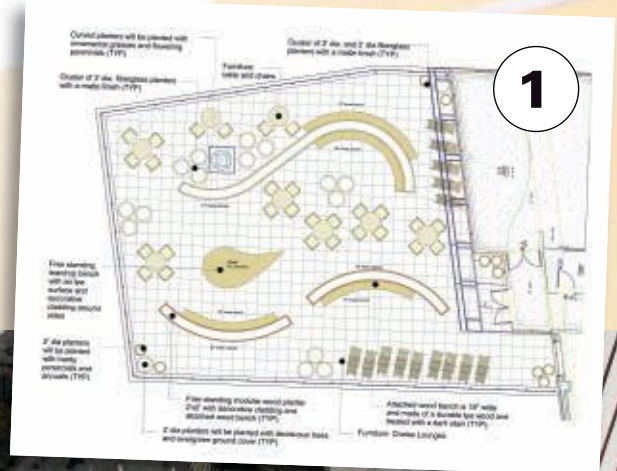
A notion of movement and the need to generate multiple spaces is what inspired Michael Franco, a landscape architect with Town and Gardens Ltd., to create a series of modular planters joined together to create two serpentine patterns and a custom teardrop-shaped bench.

Like any project, this one wasn't without its challenges. Each step, including having to carefully cart all materials up to the rooftop within the six-month time frame, was orchestrated efficiently.

Before the installation, the roof's precast paving system was installed by others and set on insulation, rather than a pedestal system, Franco says. That created an unsuitable surface for the continuous curved planters and benches. To resolve this, all modular units had to be shimmed up, and an additional metal kickplate had to be added to hide the gap.

The team worked closely with Union City, NJ-based FJC Woodworking, Inc. to test and determine the maximum curve of the wood benches, so they could minimize the number of cuts necessary.

During the summer, the grasses helped create lush green walls to further define and screen the various seating areas from one another. Residents continue to use the terrace through the winter. After all, it provides a little bit of nature high above the city.



PHOTOS COURTESY: TOWN AND GARDENS LTD.



THE WORK

1 | THE MASTER PLAN. Note the design relationships formed between the curved planters, benches, clusters of planters and furniture. The client was pleased with the open circulation it provided, as well as the many options for seating and opportunities for shade and screening.

2 | THE THEORY IN PRACTICE. This view, taken two levels above the mechanical area, shows the garden in the winter. A lounge area on the same level allows residents to enjoy the garden throughout the year.

3 | LONG-SLEEVED IRRIGATION EFFORTS. During the installation, the irrigation system was run underneath the pavers and brought up through the metal-clad wooden planters. A special sleeve was used to route the piping, preventing soil from draining through and out onto the pavers.

4 | A SPLASH OF COLOR. Annual plantings are added in the spring and fall to all the round clusters of trees and shrubs. This helps to brighten the space and accent the perennial plantings.

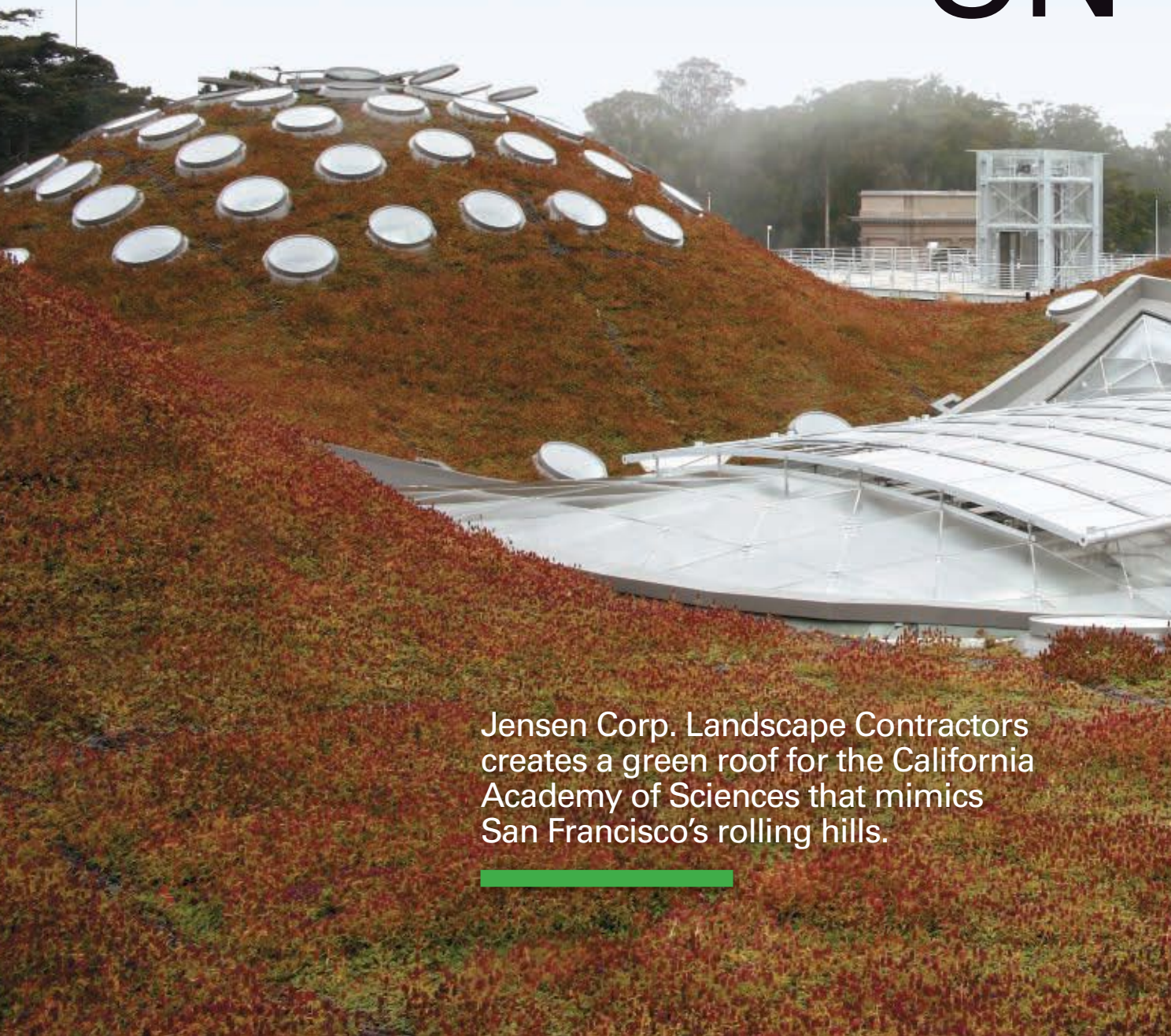
5 | TIDY BY THE TRUCKFUL. All plant materials and bagged soil had to be carefully carted through the recently finished building. The Town and Gardens staff took special care to protect the walls and carpeting. The entire planting and cleanup processes were completed in two days.

6 | TAILOR MADE. Each custom planter had to be manufactured individually off-site, and they were joined together on the terrace.

7 | BOTH SIDES NOW. The larger curved planter provides opportunities for cantilevered benches on both sides. Magnificent views of the city are on one side, and a sense of enclosure, with the plantings and the curve of the planter and bench, are on the other.

Founded in 1995 by Don Sussman and Chris Fitzpatrick, Town and Gardens Ltd. maintains a fully stocked warehouse and offices in Manhattan. The projects in which it specializes range from modest patio plantings to year-round maintenance of large institutions and community developments. This installation garnered a 2008 Environmental Improvement Grand Award from the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). For more information, visit TownAndGardens.com.

THE GREENEST ON



Jensen Corp. Landscape Contractors creates a green roof for the California Academy of Sciences that mimics San Francisco's rolling hills.

MUSEUM EARTH

BY **DANIEL G. JACOBS** MANAGING EDITOR



PROFESSIONAL LANDSCAPERS SPEND their careers making the grounds around homes and buildings a little more beautiful and a little more green. Jensen Corp. Landscape Contractors helped take that concept one step further when it installed a green roof on the California Academy of Sciences.

The roof, designed by architect Renzo Piano, echoes San Francisco's rolling hills, which posed some unique challenges for Jensen's workers.

"Keys to this job were the steep slopes," says John Vlay, CEO of Jensen Corp. Holdings, the parent company of the landscape contractor division. "Some of the slopes were greater than a 45-degree angle. We had to specially train our men with harnesses and climbing ropes, and how to tie-off to get the materials all the way up on the sides and up to the top of the hills."

Translating the design on paper to the reality of the 2.5-acre roof had its challenges, including transporting the material onto the roof.

Having built other green roofs, including The Gap's corporate headquarters in San Francisco, the team knew there were several ways to transport the 2.6 million lbs. of soil and plants up to the work site.

"We did a lot of analysis," Vlay says. "Did we want to blow the soil onto the roof? Did we want to crate it up using

The California Academy of Sciences' green roof is the largest living roof in the state and features seven dramatic hills to mimic those of San Francisco.



AWARD WINNER

containers? Or did we want to use conveyor belt systems?"

The company chose to use containers. It hoisted about 50,000 coconut husk trays, each with 3 in. of soil and native California plants, by crane to the roof. Crews also installed a grid of lava rock-filled gabions, reinforced with

steel and straps, to provide support for the roof's walkways. Another 1,000 cu. yds. of soil were distributed with old-fashioned wheelbarrows.

Only half the battle

Getting all the material up on the roof was a short-lived victory because there



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was the pesky matter of containing all the soil on the roof's hills.

"One of the biggest challenges, on these steep slopes, was holding the soil," Vlay says. "In some of these areas, the soil was starting to slip."

Because the roof was worked on in phases, the Jensen team was able to take more established material from different parts of the project and transplant it onto the slopes.

"We took some of the areas from the (flat) 'North 40' that were already rooted in and had almost fully grown sod, cut it out and put those into the areas that were very steep, so we didn't have to wait for them to take hold," Vlay says. "That's how we avoided some of the difficulties with the steep slopes."

What was planted was just as important as how they were planted. Designers wanted to use plants native to the area — and no grasses.

The Jensen team came up with what it called the Fab Four: *Fragaria chiloensis* (beach strawberries), *Prunella vulgaris* (self heal), *Armeria maritime* (sea pink) and *Sedum spathulitholium* (stonecrop).

"All the trays we put up only had those four," Vlay says. "Then we came back in and put down seed of five



50,000 coconut husk trays, each with 3 in. of soil and native California plants, were loaded onto the roof by crane.

WHAT'S UP THERE?

The native plants used on the green roof were included, at least in part, with the idea they would serve as a habitat for local fauna.

Plants used	What they attract
Beach strawberries (<i>Fragaria chiloensis</i>)	native birds
Self heal (<i>Prunella vulgaris</i>)	hummingbirds and bumblebees
Sea pink (<i>Armeria maritime</i>)	moths and butterflies
Stonecrop (<i>Sedum spathulitholium</i>)	San Bruno elfin butterfly
Tidy tips (<i>Layia platyglossa</i>)	parasitic wasps and pirate bugs
Miniature lupine (<i>Lupinus bicolor</i>)	bees and butterflies
California poppies (<i>Eschscholzia californica</i>)	bees and butterflies
California plantain (<i>Plantago erecta</i>):	butterfly larvae
Goldfield plants (<i>Lasthenia californica</i>)	beneficial native insects

— Jensen Corp. Landscape Contractors

different types: tidy tips, miniature lupine, California poppies, California plantain and goldfield plants.”

Jensen planted the varying color flowers almost in a paint-by-numbers method.

“The Prunella have gone to a dark-red color,” Vlay said in mid-August.

“I was up there (in June), and it was a beautiful purple. As the seasons come and go, it takes on different colors. Even though it’s called a green roof, sometimes it’s a purple roof. Right now, it’s the maroon roof. Other times, it’s the yellow roof. It’s always changing based on the seasons.”



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"EVEN THOUGH IT'S CALLED A GREEN ROOF, SOMETIMES IT'S A PURPLE ROOF. RIGHT NOW, IT'S THE MAROON ROOF."

— JOHN VLAY, CEO OF JENSEN CORP. HOLDINGS

Maintenance strategies

The project's goal is to have the roof become self-sustaining in San Francisco's foggy, seaside climate, but that's still a year or more away, Vlay says. In the meantime, Jensen maintains the roof and grounds around the building, which it installed, too.

Until the green roof is more established, an irrigation system must be used to keep plants alive. But the California Academy of Sciences' roof has a number of skylights, which open automatically to release the heat that builds up during the day, particularly over an indoor rainforest.

"The irrigation water would get into the skylights, go down and hit the top of the rainforest, which was all glass,"

JUST THE FACTS

- › Largest living roof in California, featuring seven dramatic hills to mimic the hills of San Francisco
- › 50,000 of coconut husk trays were loaded onto the roof by crane and installed
- › The porous trays hold 1.7 million plants
- › 197,000 sq. ft. total
- › Cost was about \$17 per sq. ft.
- › 4.5 acres total roof space, including solar panel canopy
- › 2.5 acres of planted material
- › 2.6 million lbs. total weight of soil and plants
- › Four-month construction period
- › Absorbs about 98% of all storm water, preventing as much as 3.6 million gallons of runoff from carrying pollutants into the ecosystem each year
- › An overhead spray irrigation system, featuring its own weather-tracking system, is designed to establish plant material with the intent it will be shut off in a few years once the roof becomes fully sustainable
- › A wide grid of rock gabions with reinforced steel and straps provide additional support, and create walkways for future roof maintenance
- › Gabions filled with more than 30,000 lbs. of lava rocks

— Jensen Corp. Landscape Contractors

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Vlay says. "That required a lot of glass cleaning. We had to change our irrigation system so it didn't go off when the skylights opened."

The irrigation situation translated into having to hand-water the plants, to keep them from getting stressed during the heat of the day, until they became established.

"Now that the plants are much more established, we don't have to water them throughout the day," Vlay says, noting the ultimate goal is for irrigation to be self-sustainable after two to three years.

Jensen's portion of the project was about \$4.7 million, with the green roof making up about \$2 million of the total. The project earned the company first-place honors in the Special Effects division of the California Landscape Contractors Association awards this past year. **LM**



Translating the design on paper to the reality of the 2.5-acre roof had its challenges, including transporting the material onto the roof.

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ACUTABOVE

GREEN INDUSTRY MAINTENANCE LEADERS » BY DAN JACOBS

For more than five decades, **Dennis' 7 Dees** has served the Portland area. President **David Snodgrass**, with help from Maintenance Department Manager **Jeff Rieger**, offer insights about the issues facing the maintenance industry.

TOPTRENDS

» **Sustainability.** There's been a lot of buzz about that for a number of years. It keeps getting stronger. It's not a phase. It's a trend that's going to be part of business. Obviously, we see that as our reality. We've jumped on board with sustainability and started to make sure we operate a sustainable or green business. There's a lot that makes good business sense. Some things definitely turn a profit for you. Some things give you a good image and customer reputation.

» **Cut costs.** There's a necessity to reduce costs to pull down all we can to reduce prices for our clients. There's downward pressure on prices that includes out-in-the-field costs and reducing overhead costs in the office. We're becoming leaner every day as an efficient operation driving out waste and unnecessary costs.

» **Savvier customers.** More savvy customers are paying more attention to things they haven't paid close attention to before – safety. Companies can't afford an accident. The savvy customers are getting information about your company. And nobody wants an accident on their property. They're starting to look deeper before they hire.

TOP OBSTACLES

» **Low-bidders.** There's always been a challenge from low bidders, but it seems like some national companies are putting extreme pricing pressures on the market. The temptation is to play the same game. But that's a short-term strategy, and we're in business for the long haul. We're not being drawn into that competitive low-pricing-at-the-cost-of-low-service strategy.

» **Soft pockets.** There are soft pockets in the industry. One of those is design/build and enhancement work. It's difficult to convince people to spend in those areas. It's a huge obstacle to figure out how to get them to spend money for the right reason, when it involves improving their property.



David Snodgrass, right, and Jeff Rieger are dealing with the obstacles of extreme pricing pressures and convincing customers to spend money in the design/build area.

INSIDE INFO

Company: Dennis' 7 Dees

Founded: 1956

Employees: 260

Revenue 2009: \$19 million

Rank on 2009 LM Top 150: 66

Keys to being an industry leader: As an industry, we're getting attacked. Activists are trying to label our industry as the industry that pollutes, the industry that uses illegals, the industry that wastes water. The Green Industry has one of the smallest carbon footprints. We're not doing a good job of defending ourselves. We're the original Green Industry. It's important we do what we have to in order to ensure the industry stays strong. We need to protect it and not rely on others to do that for us. If we're really going to do what we can for the industry, we need to get involved. We need to take a stand and defend the industry.

» **Pricing pressure.** Many long-term clients are saying, 'Maybe, I can get good pricing because prices seem to be coming down.' Some long-standing clients and contracts are deciding it's time to bid. That's a challenge.

TOP OPPORTUNITIES

» **Everybody sells.** We've got design/build residential staff, commercial installation, maintenance services and retail garden centers. There's lot of opportunities to cross sell. We're doing a much better job of one department setting up or selling for the next department. The opportunities are developed for one department by someone outside that department.

» **New markets.** We offer snow and ice service, though we have iffy weather. Some years we may get it; some year we don't. Hopefully, we can leverage that to get our foot in the door and become their landscape maintenance company. To invest in snow plowing equipment is a huge speculation. We're doing it so when the event happens, we'll be able to service our customers better. That gives us a competitive advantage. We're able to talk to our customers and separate ourselves from others because of that capability.

» **Marketing.** When the economy slows, our natural reaction is to hunker down and try to improve our numbers by cutting back. That works great for many of our costs, but not all of them. Our competitors aren't spending money on marketing. This is a big opportunity. We've increased our marketing budget and are looking for a gain in market share. Some of that shows up in a tough economy. We're counting on most of it showing up when the economy and the marketplace improve.

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continued on page 39

Grind it up

Fecon offers its Bull Hog compact equipment mulcher for mid-size and smaller excavators. It features a fixed rotor system that allows users to grind material as wide as 4 in. in diameter. It also features

the HDT tooling system, which includes double and single carbide and stone and chipper tools. The unit offers a 36-in. cutting width and a maximum weight between 1,000 and 1,200 lbs. Targeted for excavators in the 7- to 12-metric-ton range with 17 to 30 gpm of auxiliary flow, the mulcher also works on other applicable machinery, such as larger backhoes. *Fecon.com or 800/528-3113*



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TTTechnologies.com or 630/851-8200

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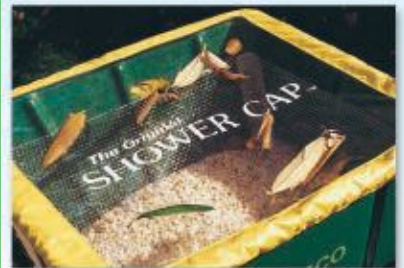
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Learning to laugh at ourselves

*Rose are red.
Violets are blue.
I sleep naked.
How 'bout you?*

Last month, I promised I'd close this rather difficult year by sharing a few "Jamie gems" — humorous stories proving our middle son, who happens to have Down syndrome, is wiser than his 14 years on Earth — and much wiser than his Old Man.

I knew the limerick above would grab readers, and probably kick-start your 2010 weight-loss program. Don't worry: In this poetic instance, I'm the reporter — not the author.

In mid-November, my wife, Bridgid, asked me to help Jamie with his homework. I noticed "write a poem" was one of the tasks and immediately thought, "Yeah baby. Now we're talking. Writing's my area of expertise. I'm your Daddy."

Not really. I've come to find out poetry is *my* Daddy. Jamie's vacant stare after I struggled for half an hour to come up with two lame examples of self-made poems confirmed as much.

Little did I know when I sat down with our "special needs" child that night that it would take Jamie less than 60 seconds to one-up the Old Man. Jamie's poem wasn't one we could share with his class, but I can share it with you, and I think we all can agree it's much shorter and sweeter than my usual prose.

Here are three more Jamie gems intended simply

to give you a few fat-free bellyaches this holiday season:

▶ Ever since we bought his older brother, Mickey, a cell phone, Jamie's tried to make a case that he, too, needs one. When Jamie's *younger* sister, Meg, got a cell phone before he did, Jamie was off the hook. Bridgid tried in vain to reason with Jamie: "Meg knows my work number, Daddy's work number, our cell phone numbers, Grandma Bonnie's and Pop's home and cell numbers, and Grandma Pat's home phone number." "Mom, that's why they have speed dial on cell phones," quipped Jamie, who, in Dad's book, earned himself a cell phone with that response. (Too bad — or, some might say, thank God — I can't combat Bridgid's reasoning as quickly or effectively as Jamie.)

▶ A few Decembers ago, I lost Jamie in a JC Penney store attached to a mall. After a failed 10-minute search, I finally came clean with the store's security guard, who quickly boomed, "Code Adam! Code Adam!" into her walkie-talkie. As she and I rushed to the mall entrance to ensure Jamie didn't leave the store alone, or with anyone else, she asked me "standard questions" and jotted my answers down on a form on her clipboard. "What color shirt is he wearing?" "Blue, I think. Maybe black, gray or green." She shook her head, clearly disappointed in clueless Dad. Then I realized I was sitting on a gold mine of information: "Jamie has Down syndrome, glasses, red hair, and a stuffed fake snake around his neck he likes to shake," I proudly offered up. But this by-the-book security guard didn't write down, or share with her co-workers via walkie-talkie, even one of those nuggets. "Mmmhmm. What color pants?" she proceeded. No thanks to Dumb & Dumber, Jamie was found, safe and sound — before Bridgid found out!

▶ A few years ago, we spent the holidays skiing and snowboarding in Burlington, VT. While dining at a fine restaurant, Jamie became fascinated with a nutcracker his size. I shared how the wooden toy soldier works. "Show me, Dad," Jamie impishly urged. "I can't. There aren't any nuts," I answered. "You're a guy ... Put 'em in there, and I'll slam his arm down," Jamie roared, with his contagious crazy cackle.

See, 2009 could have been worse ...

With the notorious **nutcracker incident**, Jamie reminds me that **2009 could have been worse.**



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