

# NEWS+VIEWS

GREEN INDUSTRY EVENTS, TRENDS AND TIPS

## 'Outdoor living' landscapes still a hot item with homeowners

BY RON HALL EDITOR-AT-LARGE

**T**he 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

## 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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