



Charlie King founded King GREEN in 1987 in the basement of his home with the help of his wife, Barbara, and his late father, Alfred King. Although the company's administrative headquarters are in Gainesville, GA, it depends on wherever King is at that day. His company offers a range of lawn care and structural pest control services.

How did you enter the lawn care business? I wandered into the lawn care business by accident. In 1978, I graduated from the University of Georgia and was working in a grocery chain as a management trainee. A friend of mine recently started in the lawn care industry and asked me to try it out. I wasn't even looking for a career, but I found one.

Give us an idea of your typical day. I don't have one, and that's what I like best about my business and lifestyle. I sprayed from dawn to dusk in the early years. Now, I may be meeting with customers or checking lawns. We recently started a pest control division, and I'm learning that science. It's like starting all over again. I also spend time training and working with employees.

North Georgia suffered through one of its worst droughts in 2007 and 2008. How did it and the resulting watering ban affect your company? The drought exposed every weakness and strength in our company. We coped by

communicating, educating and by listening to our customers. We manipulated programs and were able to get through the drought with a minimum of impact to our customer base. But between the drought and the weak economy, we got hit harder than we'd have liked.

Our response to the depressed economy has been to service the accounts harder than ever, be patient and listen to our customers. If a customer needs to skip a service, we don't make a big deal about it.

How's your season going so far? Business is flat. We have few new homeowners moving in, and people are watching what they spend. Homeowners, apartments, commercial properties — it doesn't matter because it's across the board. It started last fall because of economic conditions, and the drought didn't help.

As you look into the future, what do you see? The next five to 10 years will be an interesting time for our company. I'm 54, my vice president and partner, Greg Wagner, is close to 50, and we're preparing a new generation of people ready to assume the helm. My daughter Jennifer joined us this January, and she's excited about the future, as are the other younger employees who've been with us. We have a succession plan.

Tell us about kudzu control. Kudzu is a vine from Japan. It grows 6 in. a day, but a good broadleaf herbicide will kill it. If you have a 4-hour job, by the time you finish, you can see it dying.

Kudzu is an annual that dies off with a frost, but it comes back the next year and will swallow an acre of pine trees if you let it. We get calls to kill it on the back of properties, near apartments and places like that.

AT A GLANCE

COMPANY: King GREEN, Gainesville, GA

FOUNDED: 1987

PRINCIPAL: Charlie King, president

NUMBER OF LOCATIONS: 4

SERVICE AREA: Gainesville, Athens, Watkinsville and Atlanta, GA, and Charlotte, NC

EMPLOYEES: 70

SERVICES OFFERED: commercial, residential and sports turf care; tree and shrub service, specialty services (kudzu control, seeding, renovation, aeration); King GREEN IPM termite and pest control

INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT: Metropolitan Atlanta Landscape and Turf Association founding member (president, 1997-1998), PLCAA board member, Georgia Turf-grass Association board member (2000-2005)

HOBBIES: fishing, camping and flying a small plane

FAMILY: wife Barbara and two daughters, Jennifer and Amber

WEBSITE: KingGREEN.com

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