

ACUTABOVE

GREEN INDUSTRY MAINTENANCE LEADERS » BY DAN JACOBS

Not many 40-year-old company founders can say they've led their companies for 25 years. **Ray Bradley** founded what would become Raymow Enterprises when he was 15 years old. Every time his friends would come over and ask to see Ray, his Mom would tell them Ray was mowing. From that came the name "RAY-MOW." The company now includes Southern Landscaping Materials and Ray Bradley Real Estate. *Landscape Management* contacted Bradley about the changes, challenges and opportunities his operation faces as it heads into its 26th year of business.



Starting business as a teenager, Ray Bradley has never worked for someone else.

INSIDE INFO

Company: Raymow Enterprises

Headquarters: Tampa, FL

Employees: 275 full-time

2009 revenue: \$12.5 million

LM Top 150 Ranking: No. 99

Key to being a maintenance leader: From our vantage point, the key to being a leader in this industry is pretty simple: Do what you say you are going to do when you say you are going to do it. My grandfather preached this to my dad, who in turn preached it to me. It seems cliché, but it has distinguished Raymow from our competitors on many occasions. We are in the relationship business as much as we are in the landscape maintenance business, so by living this motto our integrity is illustrated and our reputation — perhaps our most important asset — is protected.

» **Devaluing service.** With so many inexperienced competitors entering the market, the price — and, therefore, the value of grounds maintenance/landscape services — is being driven down. More often, we are seeing customers choose a contractor based foremost on price opposed to any other factor, such as experience/longevity in the marketplace, reputation, etc. This drives down the quality of service, because oftentimes, those submitting extremely low pricing cannot provide the level of quality service that we professionals in the industry have grown to expect and endeavor toward.

TOP OPPORTUNITIES

» **Recruiting.** The high unemployment rate has exposed a pool of highly skilled and educated Green Industry talent. This influx has afforded us the luxury of maintaining our high standards. We are able to spend time getting to know prospective employees during the interview process, to better determine whether they have the skills we're searching for — and whether their personality traits are well suited for our culture.

» **Eco-friendly services.** By demonstrating long-term monetary savings opportunities that can be achieved by performing environmentally conscious landscaping tasks for customers, we are able to create universally beneficial situations.

» **Culture.** The resilience of my staff and the preservation of our culture during the economic turbulence of the last couple of years have been a source of motivation and encouragement. I'm amazed by the accomplishments of a team whose perseverance and determination refuse to allow 'losing' to be an option.

TOP TRENDS

» **Water conservation.** In Florida, the business of conserving this most precious natural resource is big business. With an estimated 1 billion gallons of water being used outdoors every day in our state, Green Industry practices are vital to the conservation movement.

» **Overregulation.** Fertilizer regulation is not based on comprehensive and accurate research. The hasty decision to continue to pull products such as nitrogen-based fertilizers off of the shelf is both expensive and irresponsible.

» **Turf elimination.** In landscaping terms, turf is the least expensive material to install, but perhaps the most expensive material to maintain. We have noticed a trend wherein homeowners, homeowner associations and developers are choosing to install more landscape plant material in lieu of turf, which is a plus on many fronts. From the price of installation through to the maintenance and guarantee of the plant material, this option has proven to be mutually beneficial for Raymow as well as for our clients.

TOP OBSTACLES

» **Federal regulation.** From healthcare reform to tax legislation, the current administration continues to make decisions that adversely affect small businesses.

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