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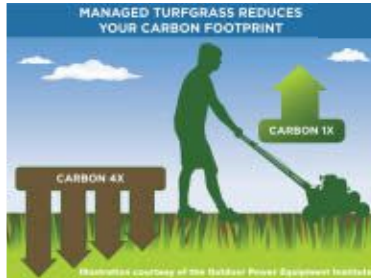
55%

We had a rough year, but it could have been worse.

It was pretty much like any other year. 14%

We had a nice year. 9%

2009 was great; wish we had a few more months. 9%



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Homeless, but *not* hopeless

Chris Gardner, author of the best-selling autobiography *'The Pursuit of Happyness,'* shares his street smarts with Green Industry professionals.

BY MARTY WHITFORD EDITOR-IN-CHIEF



Will Smith and his son, Jaden, played Chris Gardner and his son, Christopher Jr., in the 2006 blockbuster movie "The Pursuit of Happyness."

"EVERY TIME I see the movie "The Pursuit of Happyness," I'm absolutely amazed. How did those people spend \$70 million to tell a story about what I did with nothing?" half-jokes Chris Gardner, who penned the same-named rags-to-riches autobiography on which the 2006 blockbuster was based.

Delivering the keynote address at the Golf Industry Show in San Diego Feb. 11, Gardner took Green Industry aces on an emotional ride — with a crowd of thousands roaring with laughter one minute and solemnly reflecting the next.

Gardner says his autobiography strikes a reverberating chord because it reaches out to every dad who also has to be a mom, every mom who also has to be a dad, and everyone who refuses to let his dream drift away.

After his book was published, it became a best seller for nine consecutive weeks. It was so popular it was printed in 33 languages eventually.

Gardner took GIS attendees on his journey — from the streets of San Francisco to Wall Street stockbroker to the *New York Times* Best Seller list to the silver screen — with the

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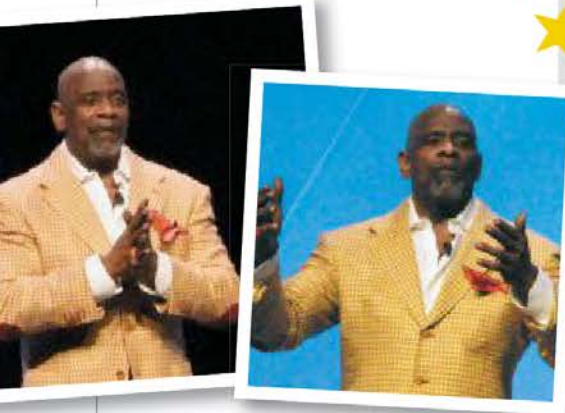
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\$20-million-man, Will Smith, and his son Jaden Smith, playing Gardner and his son, Christopher Jr.

Gumption

One of the most humbling moments along Gardner’s ascent happened early on in the movie-planning process.

“I was asked to ‘take a meeting’ in L.A. with these movie moguls,” Gardner says. “I’m from Chicago. We take trains. We take naps. We don’t ‘take’ meetings.”

But Gardner did “take” the meeting, during which one of the film producers from Escape Artists asked Gardner why he recently had declined an opportunity to promote his book on national television. “I asked the gentleman, ‘Have you ever seen the movie ‘Forrest Gump?’” Gardner says. “The room got quiet. Then the gentleman nodded and said, ‘Yes.’ I told him I felt just like Forrest in the scene where he walks into an antiwar rally, and they ask him to speak. When the microphone finally gets turned on, all you hear Forrest say is, ‘And that’s all I have to say.’ I had written my autobiography, and that’s really all I had to say.”

After the meeting, the man who set it up turned to Gardner in the elevator and said, “You know that gentleman you asked if he had seen ‘Forrest Gump’? Well, he’s Steve Tisch. He produced ‘Forrest Gump.’”

“So there I was, in a meeting with Hollywood big-wigs looking at turning my book into a movie, and I actually asked the producer of ‘Forrest Gump’ — winner of six Oscars and at the time the second-highest grossing film ever — if he’d seen his own movie.”

HOLLYWOOD VS. REALITY

According to Chris Gardner, who penned the best-selling autobiography “The Pursuit of Happyness,” the following are just a few of the creative liberties taken by Hollywood when producing the like-named, Academy Award-nominated, silver screen version of his rags-to-riches story:

HOLLYWOOD

REALITY

In the 2006 film “The Pursuit of Happyness,” Chris Gardner’s son — played by Jaden Smith, son of Will Smith and Jada Pinkett Smith — is 5 years old.

“When my ex knocked on my door and said, ‘I can’t do this anymore. Here,’ and handed over our son, Christopher Jr., to me, he was just 14 months old. We instantly became homeless because the boarding house I was staying at didn’t allow kids. Had the script stuck to reality, it would have made the dialogue between Will Smith, who played me in the movie, and his son, who played my son, very difficult,” Gardner says.

Gardner (played by Will Smith) has his belongings in a single suitcase.

“Let’s get real,” Gardner says. “When I was running around like a mad man after work every day, desperately trying to get into a homeless shelter, I wasn’t as lucky as Will Smith was in the movie. I didn’t have a 5-year-old and a suitcase. I had a 14-month-old on my back and bags and bags of stuff in my hands.”

Gardner wears one suit at work for an entire year as he toils away as a trainee at Dean Witter, while trying to hide that he and his son are homeless.

“Let’s set the record straight: I didn’t wear *one* suit for a year straight,” Gardner says. “I had *two* suits. One was blue, one was gray. The joke around the office was that I was in the Civil War ... and I was switching sides every day.”

Breaking the cycle

Gardner — now a multimillionaire and CEO of Gardner Rich LLC, a Chicago-based brokerage firm — says the most important thing he’s done in his life is be there for his son and daughter, Jacintha. And they, in turn, are always here for Gardner, teaching him as much as he’s passed on to them.

“I’ll never forget the one day during all of this hoopla that my daughter really put me in my place,” Gardner recalls.

“Will Smith’s name had just come up as the perfect actor to play me in the movie. Don’t get me wrong. I love Will Smith. I’m a big fan of his music and movies. But when I think of Will Smith, I think ‘blockbuster’ and ‘outer space.’ My book of memoirs was all about inner space.

“When I shared my doubts with Jacintha, she turned to me and said, ‘Poppa, Will Smith played Muhammad Ali. ... If he can play Muhammad Ali,

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HAPPYNESS

continued from page 8
he can play you!”

Gardner knew by the age of 5 the importance of being a good dad. He had a few good “bad examples” in his life.

“I grew up without a father, and for years I had a stepfather who reminded me of that fact,” says Gardner, with a tremendous sadness in his voice. “My stepfather would say, ‘I ain’t your daddy. You ain’t got no daddy — sometimes driving home the point with a 12-gauge shotgun pointed right at my chest.’”

Gardner credits his mother, Bettye Jean, for his relentless pursuit of happiness.

“I blame my success on Mom,” Gardner says. “My old-fashioned mother taught me I could do anything and be anything I wanted to. ... Apparently, I took it too far.”



Y perseverance matters

“Happyness” is purposely spelled with a “y” — instead of correctly with an “i” — in the book and movie titles because that’s how the daycare center that took in Christopher Jr. spelled its name. And that place, Happyness, was crucial to Gardner being able to pursue his dream of becoming a broker while knowing Christopher Jr. was in good hands.

Some people who paid the price of admission to see “The Pursuit of Happyness” felt like too much of the movie was a downer. Gardner says they missed the message: The rainbow is

definitely worth chasing — just don’t expect to stumble upon several pots of gold along the journey. Many times, the rainbow is the journey itself.

What do Gardner and “The Pursuit of Happyness” have to teach Green Industry professionals? Two words: perspective and gratitude, especially amidst this so-called Great Recession.

“Never lose hope — no matter what,” Gardner says. “Dream big and work hard. The rest will take care of itself. Better buckle up, though. Life’s a real trip. And don’t forget to enjoy the ride.” **LM**

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ANLA applauds \$45 million in USDA funding for plant health safeguarding

WASHINGTON — The American Nursery & Landscape Association (ANLA) applauds the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) for recently allocating \$45 million, provided by

Section 10201 of the 2008 Farm Bill, for projects in support of critical plant health safeguarding initiatives across America. Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack announced the funding in late January.



ANLA's Craig Regelbrugge fought hard for the funding.

Funding will be provided to more than 50 cooperators, including state

departments of agriculture, universities, non-profit organizations and USDA agencies in support of more than 200 projects. As Vilsack indicated, these state, regional and national projects will support the Farm Bill goals of building strong systems to safeguard the health of U.S. agricultural industries using early plant pest detection and surveillance, threat identification and mitigation. Roughly \$2 million of the funds are earmarked for projects specifically designed to safeguard nursery production.

"A number of the target projects are relevant to the Green Industry," said Craig Regelbrugge, ANLA vice president for government relations. "We are especially excited that several projects will seek to validate and measure effectiveness of best management practices and nursery systems approaches for pest management and nursery plant certification."

One such project is expected to be carried out in a partnership involving the Horticultural Research Institute (HRI) and a university cooperator. Other projects of interest to the industry are focused on detection or containment of serious plant pests that affect nursery production and commerce.

The Farm Bill Sec. 10201 plant safeguarding initiative was a key ANLA farm bill priority. Since the bill was passed, ANLA has chaired the Specialty Crop Farm Bill Alliance's implementation team focused on guiding use of these important funds through a fair and transparent process overseen by USDA's Animal and Plant Health Inspection Service (APHIS). In the coming weeks, APHIS will be working with the more than 50 cooperators, including HRI, who will receive funds as they develop formal work plans.

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The return of the trade show?

It's been a rough year for, well, almost everyone. Nearly every aspect of the Green Industry has felt the pressure from a down economy. But there might be some bright news on the horizon.

Recently The Mid-America Horticultural Trade Show (Mid-Am) announced a 2.3% gain in buyer registrations at the 2010 trade show, held Jan. 20-22 at McCormick Place West in Chicago. Total registration was 7,931 with 5,972 buyers, 1,546 exhibitors and 413 others. There was a smaller show floor than in previous years with 303 companies exhibiting, but with more buyers, there is reason to hope.

Mid-Am isn't the only show with good news. Earlier in January, Landscape Ontario's Congress, Canada's largest international horticultural, lawn and garden trade show and conference boasted a 22% increase in attendance from the previous year.

With that in mind, perhaps it's time to start making plans to attend GIE+EXPO October 28-30 in Louisville, KY. Register online now for the industry's mega show by visiting www.gie-expo.com. Visit the site regularly for updates on events planned for the tradeshow as well as information on exhibitors. There you also can find links to hotels or you can call the Louisville Housing Bureau, (800) 743-3100 or (502) 561-3100 to book your lodging.

GIE+EXPO is ranked the 14th largest tradeshow in America, according to *Trade Show Executive* magazine. GIE+EXPO is sponsored by the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI), Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) and Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS).



Iron Mike goes green

Green Industry professionals got to meet "Iron Mike" Ditka — the only man on the planet to win Super Bowl rings as a player (Dallas Cowboys, Super Bowl VI), assistant coach (Cowboys, Super Bowl XII) and head coach (Chicago Bears, Super Bowl XX) — at the recent Golf Industry Show in February in San Diego. "Da Ditka" appearance came compliments of BASF — a Green Industry plant health champion.

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Leveraging 2009's lessons

We're over the shock of the seemingly unrelenting stream of bad news that dominated winter 2009. The daily reports of massive bank failures, record-breaking numbers of foreclosures and waves of job losses cast a smothering gray pall of uncertainty over almost everything. While our economy has a long way to go to recover what's been lost, we're confident the worst is behind us. We're now more certain of what to expect and what we must do as our 2010 season gets in full swing. That's the good news.

The bad news is that the strong rebound we had hoped for in our country's economic fortunes and a return to robust growth for our industry are still a ways off. This season will not be one of the better years for most of us. Even so, our industry is better positioned than most because we have firm control of our companies and the public appreciates our services. And now that spring is here we're blessedly busy.

We have sales calls to make, employees to train and clients requiring our services. We're in full hustle, with three goals topping our agendas:

1. Being as visible as possible within our markets;

2. Marketing and selling like we've never done before; and

3. Delivering the most personal and appreciated service possible.

Too busy to be discouraged about this season's prospects, we're guardedly optimistic about 2010 in spite of the general economy. We're convinced of the long-term success of our companies and a return to growth in the landscape industry, even if it is modest this year.

We remind ourselves that we have a lot going for us, which we would recognize if we reflect on it a little bit.

Small business, big opportunities

We should also remind ourselves we're an industry comprised of tens of thousands of businesses guided by an aggressive, entrepreneurial spirit.

Most of our operations are small, even by accepted definitions of small business. The advantages of being small sometimes outweigh the disadvantages — especially during periods of rapid change, such as we're experiencing. Small companies can react quickly to shifts in the market or to changes in customers' situations and needs.

Small also means not being hamstrung by unions or haunted by underfunded pension plans.

Going into last season many of us cut costs, increased our marketing and sales efforts or realigned our mix of services. Some of us did all three.

We're now applying the lessons we learned from last season, and we're more confident of our ability to gauge and fully capitalize on our companies' prospects.

As humorist Tom Bodett said, "In school, you're taught a lesson and then given a test. In life, you're given a test that teaches you a lesson."

Every season brings its own lessons, many of them hard-earned. Granted, given the choice, we would rather not have another learning experience like last year.

We have a lot going for us, which we would recognize if we reflect on it a little bit.

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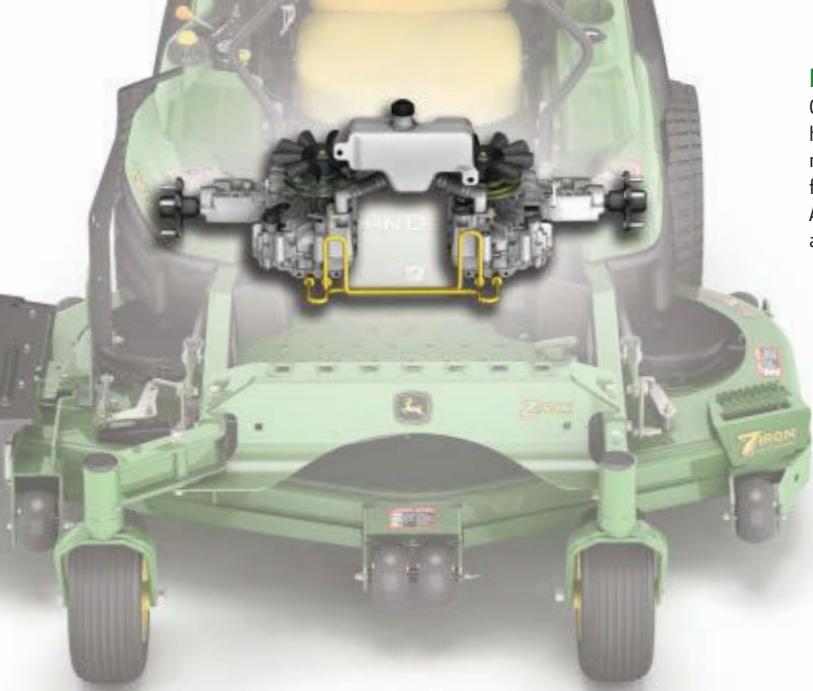
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JOHN DEERE

KEEPING THE WHEELS TURNING

Two successful companies share their differing approaches to truck/equipment maintenance and repair.

WHEN RICK KIER turned 16 and was finally old enough to get his driver's license, he took the money he had saved from a paper route and mowing neighbors' lawns and invested it in a new Chevrolet pickup. Because the region of New York State where Kier lives typically gets 100 inches or more of snow dumped on it annually, he also bought a snowplow for the truck. That was in 1978.

By the time Kier graduated from Jamevilles-Dewitt High School, he was the hustling owner/operator of Rick Kier Summer and Winter Services, with a fleet of three pickup trucks and several classmates as employees.

So began Kier's career in landscaping and snow management that, during his career as a landscape professional, has seen him purchase 64 trucks over the years. As the founder and owner of 23-year-old Pro Scapes, based in Jamesville, NY, Kier's fleet now consists of 30 trucks, including the three new models purchased last year.

In 2009 Kier also added to his equipment fleet four additional payloaders, three backhoes and a 100-hp farm tractor — all being maintained and repaired in a new four-bay maintenance building at Pro Scapes' headquarters on a rolling, scenic former dairy farm in Jamesville, just outside of Syracuse. The new maintenance shop replaces a building half its size that was no longer adequate to handle the company's vehicle/equipment maintenance and repair needs.

"Trucks and equipment are a huge part of our operation," says Kier, who for many years did or helped out with most of his company's vehicle and equipment maintenance and repairs.

"We have a lot of people, employees and customers, that depend on our equipment. If we don't have the equipment or it's not performing satisfactorily, then our people aren't working and our customers aren't getting the service we've promised them."

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» WHEELER LANDSCAPING

- » FOUNDED: 1976
- » NUMBER OF TRUCKS: 23
- » HEADQUARTERS: Chagrin Falls, OH
- » WEBSITE: wheelerlandscaping.com

This past year, Wheeler Landscaping modernized its logo, which it proudly displays on its secure, enclosed equipment trailers.

» PRO SCAPES

- » INCORPORATED: 1988
- » NUMBER OF TRUCKS: 30
- » HEADQUARTERS: Jamesville, NY
- » WEBSITE: proscapes.com

This past fall, to help get its maintenance shop in order prior to another busy snow season, Pro Scapes' founder and owner Rick Kier sought the help of fleet management consultant John Dolce.



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Outside consultant

Recognizing the importance of safe, dependable trucks and other equipment, and planning for Pro Scapes to continue growing, Kier this past fall enlisted the aid of fleet management consultant John Dolce to help put systems in place that ensure the company's truck and equipment maintenance and repair program will continue to meet its needs.

Even though the new maintenance shop is larger, cleaner and better organized, the company's continued growth had put a strain on its ability to keep trucks and other equipment properly maintained and serviced. And, on occasion, this strain caused "finger pointing" among the crews or between the crews and the shop, Kier realized.

This isn't unusual, Dolce explained to Kier. The consultant described the stress being put on the maintenance shop as part of the "growing pains" of a successful operation.

One of the solutions, Dolce suggested, was more employee training on proper vehicle and equipment use. Kier agreed.

"One of the reasons we've been so successful is because we're committed to training. The next step for us is to implement a structured program for our vehicles and every piece of equipment," Kier says. "I'm not going to slow down. I'm going to continue growing this company and buying more trucks and equipment. But what I have to do is lower our overall costs for vehicle and equipment utilization, maintenance and repair."

Dolce, who has been a fleet consultant for almost 40 years and has written three books on the subject, looks at truck repairs and maintenance strictly by the numbers.

"Words have different meanings. They can be misunderstood. Numbers can't," says Dolce. "In building your service fleet and related fleet management and maintenance programs, develop systems to keep your field crews in close communication with your fleet and equipment maintenance person or people. But manage it with numbers — just like you do the rest of your business."

Dolce points out there comes a time when the costs of maintaining and repairing vehicles and equipment, and the risk of related downtime and lost production, far outweigh the machines' value to a company.

Unless a company meticulously tracks each truck's and each piece of equipment's expenses, also considering factors such as depreciation and trade-in value, it might hang onto vehicles and production equipment much too long.

This, and misused trucks and equipment, result in unexpected breakdowns and costly repairs, which can be a huge drain on a shop manager's time and resources, and can trigger disruptions in production and lost revenues.

Dolce says shop managers and lead mechanics — even the most talented and organized — can only do so much.

Many feel like they're being asked to "do a 12-hour job in an 8-hour day" because systems, based on numbers that track every aspect of a truck's (or piece of equipment's) usage, maintenance and repair history are not in place.

Mirror check

To help determine where the inefficiencies resided in the system Pro Scapes used to maintain and repair its vehicle fleet, owner Kier allowed Dolce to spend a day in private, separate, face-to-face meetings at the company headquarters with its two

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// I BUILT THIS BUSINESS BASED ON MY ATTENTION TO DETAIL, AND I BROUGHT IN PEOPLE THAT HAVE THE SAME ATTENTION TO DETAIL."

— Rick Kiers, Pro Scapes

Pro Scapes' distinctive red service delivery fleet, a common sight in central New York, flanks Rick Kier and his management team.



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COVER STORY

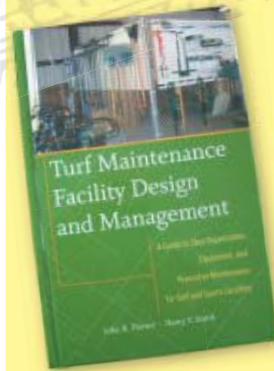
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full-time and two part-time mechanics and also the firm's account managers.

Dolce reminded each employee he wasn't there to judge or criticize. He asked them to speak frankly about their jobs, and about any problems or frustrations they experienced with their vehicles or equipment. The meetings generally lasted 20 to 25 minutes each. The employees spoke frankly after some initial hesitation.

During the course of the interviews it became apparent Pro Scapes had

continued on page 28



This book focuses on proper shop setup and management and is not an equipment repair "how-to."

SHOP MANAGEMENT — BY THE BOOK

Every landscape or grounds maintenance shop manager should keep a copy of the book "Turf Maintenance Facility Design and Management," as a reference.

The book offers practical information relating to the art and science of setting up and running an efficient vehicle and equipment maintenance and repair facility.

It focuses on efficient shop management rather than attempting to be a vehicle or equipment maintenance and repair manual. That's what makes it so valuable.

Its 10 chapters cover almost every aspect of designing and the processes involved in running a shop that keep landscape and grounds vehicles and equipment safe and in full production. Discover **do's** and **don'ts** for:

- The role of the turf equipment manager;
- Maintenance facility and shop design;
- Preventive maintenance;
- Selecting tools and equipment for the shop;
- Training equipment operators;
- Filling the turf equipment manager position; and
- Safety regulations and regulatory agencies.

The book is co-authored by John R. Piersol and Harry V. Smith. Piersol is Director of Golf/Landscape/Forestry for Lake City (FL) Community College. Smith, a professor at the same college and now retired, for many years wrote the popular "In the Shop" column in *Landscape Management* magazine. The book, published in September 2008, can be ordered online from Amazon.com or Wiley, its publisher. — RH



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COVER STORY

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work to do with maintaining and repairing its fleet. Much of that work focuses on a greater attention paid to pre- and post-trip reporting, recordkeeping and better communication between the field crews (through their supervisors) to the mechanics. This last point was a frustration voiced by almost every employee.

On the second day of Dolce's visit, he shared his findings with Kier and offered suggestions focusing on the all-important numbers side of maintenance/repair and also with its operational and personnel sides.

"I built this business based on my attention to detail, and I've brought people in that have the same attention to detail," Kier says.

On Jan. 1, Pro Scapes implemented a new reporting and tracking system to document the reports from the crews and also the performed service work. "The system tracks the cost to repair each piece of equipment as well as the annual cost of doing so," Kier adds.

Different route

Wheeler Landscaping of Chagrin Falls, OH, has decided to try something new. This spring, Wheeler will be going a *continued on page 30*

10 COMMON FLEET CONCERNS

John Dolce is a fleet management consultant with nearly 40 years of experience helping companies set up truck and equipment management, maintenance and repair systems. Dolce — author of "Fleet Management," "Vehicle Specification and Procurement," and "Analytical Fleet Maintenance Management" — says the following are the 10 most-common areas of concern he has observed in the more than 150 clients he has helped:

1. Written policies are needed for conformity;
2. There's a need for work standards and productivity measures;
3. Fleet size often is too large;
4. Management practices need improvement;
5. There's a clear need to improve communication at every level;
6. Vehicle purchase procedures need upgrading;
7. Work scheduling needs to be qualified on time, miles and fuel use;
8. Mechanics, non-mechanics and foremen need training on new technology;
9. Better balance is required for in-house and vendor maintenance activity; and
10. Cost control systems, whether manual or automated, need to be implemented and applied to vehicle maintenance management. — RH

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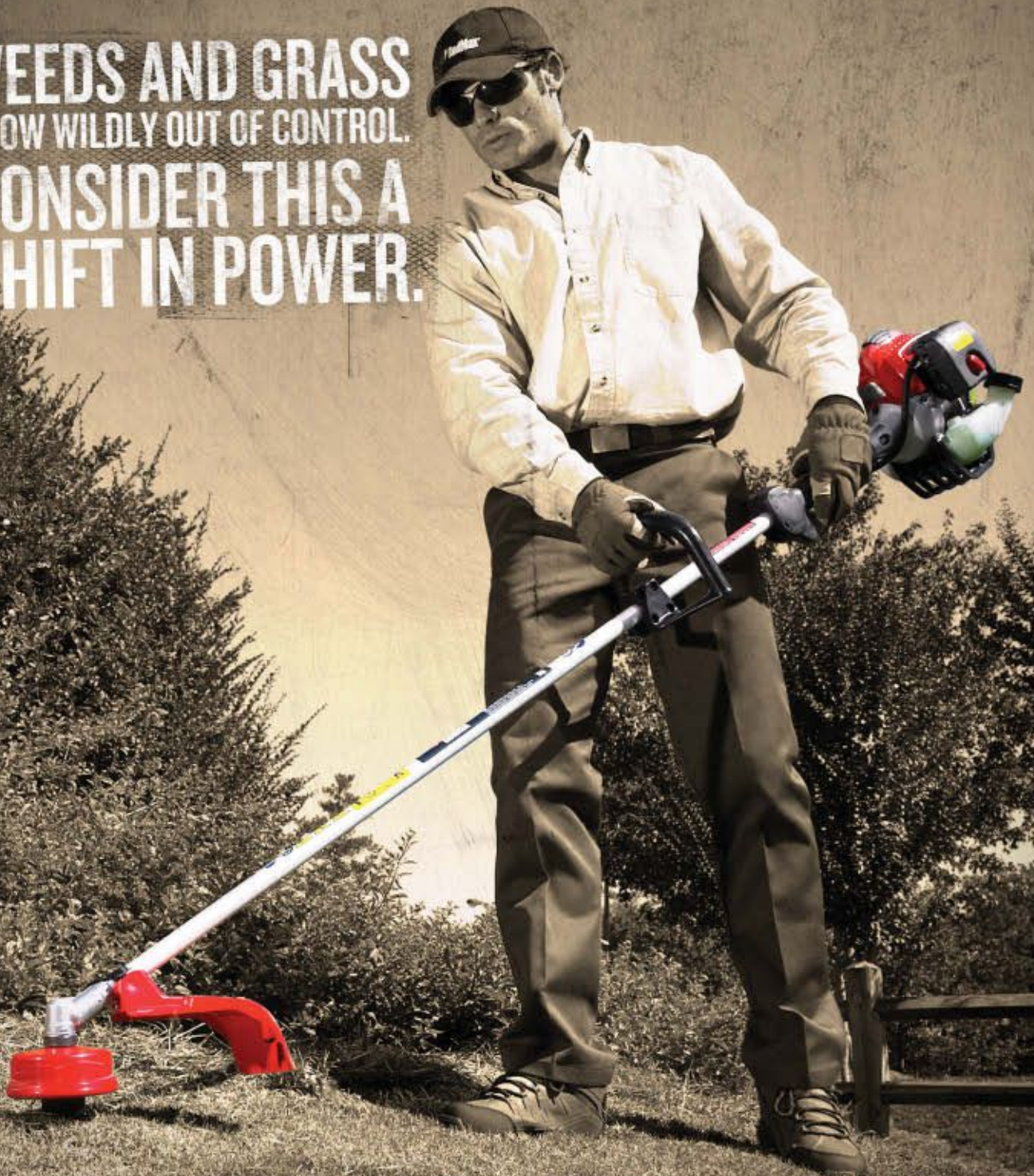
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Wheeler counts on vendors for vehicle and equipment maintenance and major repairs, but experienced personnel handle minor fixes.

THE KEY TO MAKING THIS WORK IS FINDING GO-TO VENDORS, AND BUILDING THE RIGHT RELATIONSHIPS."

— Rich Kerens, Wheeler

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different route with its truck and equipment maintenance and repair program. It's partnering with local vendors and depending on their help and expertise for service and major equipment repairs.

"We are relying a lot more on local vendors now, and they want our business," says Rick Kerens, Wheeler's Landscape Construction Project Manager.

Kerens handles installation crews during the growing season and all snow operations in the winter.

"Putting this into action was a little bit scary at first," Kerens says. "To even consider this new process, it required trust with the vendors to be able to turn over our 23 trucks and equipment and know that the repairs will be done in a timely fashion, repaired properly and at a fair price."

Like most companies, Wheeler Landscaping does its truck preventative maintenance (PM) strictly by the numbers. Every truck gets a full PM including oil changes and lubrication every 3,000 miles.

"Our supervisors and crew leaders log the mileage of their trucks when they do their pre-trips," Kerens says. "When it's time to do an oil change

we call the dealerships where we purchased the trucks. They pick it up and take it to their facilities. They change the oil and inspect all of the basic components for wear and damage. When finished, they return the trucks to us."

Kerens says the vendor keeps a complete maintenance record for each vehicle and has been very good about informing him if it finds any unusual wear, damage or any indication

of operator misuse of the truck.

"We used to do everything in-house and we found it very cumbersome tracking when maintenance and repair were being done to trucks," he says.

PM partners

Kerens equates the process to the nursery stock Wheeler Landscaping used to carry at its site but no longer does.

"We used to spend a lot of time and money caring for it, but now we let the local nurseries do that. They have the expertise to do it better, and it's more convenient and cost effective for us. We look to our truck vendors the same way."

The company will do minor fixes on its trucks inhouse — those that can easily be done through its 25-point pre-trip vehicle inspections. Everything else is done by the vendor.

"The key to making this work is finding go-to vendors and building the right relationships," Kerens says. "That vendor has to understand what we're trying to achieve as a company and that, in the end, we're both on the same team. There are great vendors out there that will become your right hand and really come through because they care about your business. This results in a win-win for both."

Kerens says the vendor must realize Wheeler Landscaping's need to keep its trucks safe and operable.

"Every supervisor we hire, every crew leader we hire, every employee we hire is needed to be on the jobs working safely, efficiently and producing billable hours for the company. If we have a problem with a truck, we can't make money with it," he says.

Wheeler has made similar arrangements with its snowplow and other equipment vendors. **LM**

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THE BENCHMARK

KEVIN KEHOE

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

Memo: The rules have changed

I like watching professional poker on TV. It is especially interesting to me that the young guns consistently beat the experienced pros. I think it's because the younger guys are not playing the same game as the older guys, and somehow the old pros missed the memo explaining the rules of the game had changed.

Something similar is happening in landscape contracting. The rules of the game are changing. Yet too many contractors insist on playing by the old rules.

The research on pricing is clear: In almost every market, prices have fallen by nearly 25% over the past five years. The forecast is for an additional 20%. This one reality — driven by declining commercial and residential spending and an increased supply of contractors — will affect every contractor's planning, budgeting and management processes. Everyone will need to relearn how to make money in this kind of business environment. The old rules provide little guidance. Here's my take on the new ones.

1 Volume is more important than gross profit margin percentage.

Too many contractors fixate on gross profit percentage when bidding work, when the game has shifted to gross profit dollars. The new game calls for:

- ▶ Rebuilding your pricing model to work on lower margins on some services and higher

margins on others;

- ▶ Addressing your product and service deliverables by refining scope and frequencies; and
- ▶ Investing more in marketing and sales.

2 Reduced overhead staffing is required for new revenue volume.

In other words, what once required three people, two must now handle. Too many contractors are locked into inefficient structures where people wear too many hats. The new game calls for:

- ▶ Reconfiguring your organization chart;
- ▶ Creating more, not less, job specialization, to establish clearer and greater accountability; and
- ▶ Migrating to performance-based pay schemes that hinge on closely tracked revenue and gross profit dollar volume.

3 There is simply too much paper — and too little information — in most contracting businesses.


The only way to reduce staffing requirements is to lighten the administrative workload of sales, service and operations management people. The new game calls for:

- ▶ Identifying the “Three Key Reports” that enable managers to manage;
- ▶ Upgrading software to SQL database systems that have superior integration of information and easy-to-manage, real-time reporting; and
- ▶ Investing in a customer relationship management (CRM) system to aid the sales force in managing the sales cycle.

As much as we hanker for them, we are not returning to the “good old days” — this year or next. We must all learn the new rules, no matter how scary and different they might seem.

The alternative is to resist these changes, and like the old poker pros, consistently get beaten by the younger guns. The good news, though, is that learning new tricks can be immensely rewarding — even for old dogs.

The good news, though, is that **learning new tricks** can be **immensely rewarding** — even for old dogs.



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For more than 30 years, Spring-Green has been beautifying America's neighborhood lawns and landscapes — and **Ted Hofer**, who soon will take over the reins as CEO of his family's business, says he is proud to stand behind his company's work. "We take our commitment to our community seriously," he says. "That includes offering the highest-quality service performed in an environmentally responsible manner by trained, licensed technicians."

Ted, you were two years old when your father acquired and began operating Spring-Green's third franchise in 1977. What are your earliest memories of the lawn care business? "My earliest memories probably deal more with the business than specifically lawn care. The commitment by my dad and mom from the beginning was amazing. I was able to see firsthand the life investment it takes for a start-up business to succeed. Working nights and weekends was the norm. It's amazing to think about the life lessons that were learned at such a young age."

Tell us about your formal education, and how that prepared you to own and operate a UPS franchise location and, now, to lead Spring-Green Lawn Care. "I have a degree in finance from the University of Illinois. My degree has really helped me at Spring-Green as I drive initiatives to improve the independent unit economics. Since I've been here, we've become committed to focusing our support on the

bottom-line performance of our franchise owners.

"My time as a UPS Store franchisee showed me the importance of finding the right balance between financial planning and operational execution — the strongest plan in the world isn't worth much if it's not executed properly. My financial background will be very important as I begin my new role at Spring-Green, but I've found through my time in various companies that regardless of the size of the business, its success will come down to how well the organization executes its plan."

Was there a defining moment or incident that convinced you that returning to the lawn care industry was the right path to take for you? "As a franchisee in another system, I felt my experience would add to the Spring-Green Support Center staff. But it was

Spring-Green's recommitment to growth through its independently owned franchises that was very attractive to me. I also really looked forward to getting back into lawn care and the opportunity to be part of a scalable business that gives franchise owners the chance to enjoy the benefits of being part of the lawn care industry: the flexibility of schedule, the high customer retention rates and high profit margins."

Describe your management style as the leader of Spring-Green, and what the company's franchisees can expect from you. "During my dad's last few years as CEO, he set a clear course for Spring-Green's long-term vision. I plan to continue down that path, focusing on maintaining and further building a world-class franchising organization. At Spring-Green, my style has been to empower

AT A GLANCE

COMPANY: Spring-Green Lawn Care, headquartered in Plainfield, IL

FOUNDED: 1977

TITLE: Vice President; On July 1, will become CEO

NUMBER OF LOCATIONS: More than 75 franchisees who operate 120 territories in 26 states; there are also five company-owned locations

SERVICES OFFERED: Lawn fertilization, weed control, tree/lawn care and more.

HOBBIES: Golf, watching movies and sports (he's an Indianapolis Colts season ticketholder). "I have been driving with my dad from Indy to Chicago for Colts games for 19 years."

FAMILY: Single, living in Chicago. Dad (Tom), Mom (Sue), sister (Laurie), brother-in-law (Mark) and two nieces (Emily and Mia) all live in Naperville, IL.

WEBSITE: Spring-Green.com

our employees. We have an incredibly knowledgeable staff composed of both industry veterans and outside thinkers. In addition to this, our franchise owners can expect the continuation of my dad's open-door policy."

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IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ Green, glossy leaves, round in shape with scalloped edges.
- ▶ Long, slender petiole is attached to the center of the leaf, forming an umbrella-like appearance. Not to be confused with dichondra, in which the petiole is attached to the edge of a kidney-shaped leaf.
- ▶ Clusters of white flowers form in summer.
- ▶ Plants reproduce from rhizomes and seeds.
- ▶ Most often found in moist to wet sites or anywhere moisture is in excess.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Minimize irrigation. Most turfgrasses can survive with less moisture than dollarweed can.
- ▶ Apply a post-emergent granule or liquid herbicide when dollarweed is actively growing.
- ▶ Dollarweed is a difficult weed to control for an entire growing season. Repeat spring or fall applications may be necessary.



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IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This summer annual germinates when soil temperatures reach a consistent 55° F.
- ▶ Offers prostrate growth habit, with leaves and sheaths that do not have hairs. Rolled vernation.
- ▶ It can be distinguished from Large crabgrass (*Digitaria sanguinalis*; see page 24 of the February 2010 issue) by the absence of hairs on the leaves and sheaths. Both species will grow under close mowing, but smooth crabgrass can survive and set seed at heights as low as 1/4 in.

- ▶ Seedhead features two to six finger-like spiked branches.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ When soil temperatures reach 55° F in the spring, apply a pre-emergent grass herbicide.
- ▶ Choose the formulation that works best for your operation. There are several liquid, granular and fertilizer granule options.
- ▶ Consult the appropriate product label for recommended rates for your area, as well as reseeding and overseeding recommendations.

For more information regarding these and other turf weeds — and related control technologies and tips — please visit www.DowProvesIt.com or call 800/255-3726.

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



BEST PRACTICES

BRUCE WILSON

The author is a partner with the Wilson-Oyler Group consultancy. Visit www.wilson-oyler.com.

Change management key to progress

Over the past 18 months, we have seen dramatic changes in the economic and political environment. These seismic shifts have affected all types of businesses, and changed the way we will be doing business in the future. They also are forcing companies to reluctantly incorporate changes into their organizations.

For many companies, change is difficult — and for good reason. Companies have worked hard to develop cultures and values that are widely supported by their employees and customers.

Many companies are being forced to examine their business practices and adjust them to the emerging market. Examples include:

- ▶ Companies with construction-based business are faced with shrinking or shrunken markets, so sales are down and workforce cuts must be made. This affects not only labor, but creeps up into management and administrative positions. Many company cultures reward longevity and loyalty. Employees can see layoffs, for example, as a changing culture and value system.
- ▶ Companies have had to reduce labor to help offset reduced prices. Employees often associate labor cuts with quality cuts, and therefore believe the company is no longer quality-focused.
- ▶ Employer perks go away. Little things like less doughnuts for the office, reduced office parties, no

bonuses, etc., are necessary to cut costs. But because they are highly valued by employees, they are seen as culture changing. “It’s not the same company.”

To owners, the changes are necessary for the health and survival of their companies — but so are their employees and customers. How does a company manage this apparent conflict? Here are some suggestions:

- ▶ Communicate a consistent vision of where the company is going and why the changes are necessary not only for the company, but also for the employees. A simple message of having to cut costs to save jobs, if delivered correctly, can help employees better understand the appearances of a changing culture.
- ▶ Realize some habits the company developed were actually bad habits. They did not appear that way in a robust economy because they were hidden by a good business environment that did not punish waste and other bad practices. This must be communicated in a positive way.
- ▶ All of the changes must lead to a winning strategy. Employees must be able to “see the light at the end of the tunnel.” You must be able to articulate to the employee how this is better for him or her.
- ▶ You must walk the talk. It’s not a good time to buy a new car, for example, for the contradictory message it might send. However, it could be a good time to buy equipment because the industrial market is depressed. If you do that, though, you must openly communicate the thought process and again explain why it is good for the company and employees.

The good news is some companies already have taken this tough pill and are glad they did it. They saw it not only as a humbling experience, but also one that will be good for the company in the long run. And they vow never to make the same mistakes again.

So, as owners and managers often have repeated in the past, with every challenge there are opportunities. Now is a great opportunity to fix things that just don’t feel right.

The good news is some companies already have taken this **tough pill** and are glad they did it. They saw it not only as a **humbling experience**, but also one that will be **good for the company** in the long run.

LM REPORTS

YOUR GUIDE TO PRODUCT RESEARCH

LAWN CARE:

HERBICIDES & TURF ENHANCEMENT

Dow Agrosciences

Dimension specialty herbicide is now more cost-effective than ever for control of crabgrass and broadleaf weeds. Based on challenging market dynamics, Dow AgroSciences has lowered the price on all formulations of Dimension, including Dimension 2EW, Dimension Ultra 40WP and Dimension on fertilizer. In addition to being more cost-effective, Dimension provides pre- and early post-emergence control of crabgrass, and season-long control of crabgrass, goosegrass, spurge and *Poa annua*. DowProvesIt.com



Agrium Advanced Technologies

The new XCU 10-Week Mini feeds turf for 10 weeks or more, and is — according to the manufacturer — the longest-lasting, mini polymer-coated, sulfur-coated urea (PCSCU) on the market. Along with the XCU 8-Week Mini and regular-sized XCU products, the new fertilizer offers a consistent and predictable release profile. It also has a low risk of leaching and volatilization, which means nutrient losses to the environment are minimized. AgriumAT.com

Bayer Environmental Science

Celcius post-emergent herbicide provides weed control on warm-season turfgrass. Safe for year-round use, it controls more than 150 broadleaf and grassy weeds, including doveweed, bull paspalum, large crabgrass, dandelions, Virginia buttonweed and dollarweed. Apply the herbicide even at the highest temperatures without fear of phytotoxicity. It contains two new active ingredients: iodosulfuron-methyl-sodium and thiencazone-methyl, plus dicamba. Use rates are 2.5, 3.7 or 4.9 oz. per acre, depending on size and weeds. Bayer.com

DuPont Professional Products

More than 550 independent university trials prove it: One application of DuPont Acelepryn insecticide controls the 10 toughest grubs at the lowest application rate ever utilized for white grub control. One early application also provides control of key surface-feeding pests, including cutworms, webworms and billbugs. In addition, research and field usage show that Acelepryn is an effective option for use in an annual bluegrass weevil control program. The reduced-risk product is available in a liquid formulation, a granular formulation and on fertilizer. proproducts.dupont.com



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IRRIGATION:

SPRINKLERS, ROTORS & ACCESSORIES



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The rugged, reliable 8005 Rotor is able to withstand the harsh conditions and vandalism present in commercial rotor applications. Its extensive customer-identified features and 80-ft. radius make it ideal for sports fields, parks and other large turf applications. Among its many features are the Memory Arc (returns the rotor to its original arc setting), brass reinforcing nozzle shaft, easy-to-change nozzles, self-adjusting turbine stator, heavy-duty retract spring and a five-year trade warranty. *RainBird.com*



Time Mark

The new Model Surge Protective Devices (SPD) Series are designed to protect sensitive electronic equipment from the harmful effects of lightning, transients and RFI/EMI interference. Models are configured for either parallel or series installation, or can be din rail or wall mounted. They are suitable for incorporation into control cabinets to protect irrigation systems and other sensitive microelectronic-based equipment. The units are self-contained in rugged plastic enclosures; a green LED is provided as a status indicator identifying power on. *Time-Mark.com*

Z-SPRAY VS. the COMPETITION

	Z-SPRAY	Competitor A	Competitor B
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By-Pass Agitation	✓	✗	✗
All Stainless Steel Chassis	✓	✗	✗
220 LB Hopper Capacity	✓	✗	✗
Optional Auxiliary Tank	✓	✗	✗
50' Hose Reel for Spot Spraying	✓	✗	✗
G.P.S. Speedometer	✓	✗	✗
8 m.p.h Transport Speed	✓	✗	✗
3 Section Independent Boom	✓	✗	✗
Hydraulic Drive Hopper	✓	✗	✗
3' to 25' Variable Spread Width	✓	✗	✗
4.0 GPM Pump	✓	✗	✗
Standard 18 Gallon Spray Capacity	✓	✗	✗
Up to 1 Gallon per 1000 capacity	✓	✗	✗
Air Injection Low Drift Nozzles	✓	✗	✗
16" Front Tires	✓	✗	✗
20" Rear Tires	✓	✗	✗
16 HP Electric Start Engine	✓	✗	✗
Locking Caster System	✓	✗	✗
5 Gallon Gas Tank	✓	✗	✗
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Hunter Industries

Calibrated at a consistent 40 psi, the new MPR40 Series spray body is designed to provide optimal performance when combined with the MP Rotator. The MPR40's pressure activated, multifunction wiper seal has been designed to reduce flow-by. The zero flush seal gives surefire operation at low pressures and enables more sprinkler heads on the same zone. The wiper seal is designed to grip the riser when operating, and keep debris out of the seal when retracted — no more body cap leaks, either. Available in shrub and 4-, 6- and 12-in pop-up models. HunterIndustries.com



Underhill

Precision solid metal fixed-spray hose nozzles are now available for all-around use on sports fields and parks for hand-watering dry spots, applying wetting agents and syringing fields before games. The patented nozzle design features stainless steel professional-grade diffuser plates with rubber covers. A wide range of flow rates provides variable spray patterns that ensure optimum coverage and uniform droplets. Nozzles are available in a range of sizes and applications, ranging from 15 to 50+ gpm. Solid brass control valves also are available with 3/4- and 1-in. hose thread adapters. Underhill.us



Toro Irrigation

With the use of the simple adjustment-band technology of the TR50P rotors, the TR50XTP series is just as convenient — but made to withstand the pressure of commercial applications, such as sports fields. It has a higher psi rating and uses a high-flow nozzle set. Is also offers the exclusive, patented X-Flow feature and TruJectory adjustment. Toro.com/irrigation

DIG Corp.

DIG's 8- and 12-in. pop-up length micro sprayers feature a unique design that incorporates a pressure-activated, low-friction, upper stem seal and a second-stage piston seal to ensure positive sealing. Available in 90°, 180° and 360° coverage, with small to large diameter, for watering that requires small droplets with low precipitation rates. They can be installed on any size 1/2-in. polyethylene tubing and used with 1/4-in. distribution tubing. Constructed of UV-resistant plastic, the rugged sprinklers feature color-coded heads to signify various spray patterns. DigCorp.com



MAINTENANCE: STAND-UP MOWERS

LESCO

The 2010 commercial mowing lineup includes two highly maneuverable, stand-on zero-turn mowers, which feature dual-lever direction and speed controls and a 1.5-in. to 4.5-in. height-of-cut adjustment. They allow for maneuverability and reduce turf compaction. *Johndeere.com*



Exmark

The Vantage stand-on mower provides users comfort, increased productivity and a high-quality cut. Combined with ergonomically designed controls, including a variable speed bar, Vantage's self-compensating suspension system reduces operator fatigue and increases job quality. The unit's compact size offers operators increased maneuverability. Standing over the front of the machine provides exceptional visibility to keep a better watch on the deck and any upcoming obstacles. Vantage's durable 1.5-in.-by-3.0-in. steel frame is available with 48- and 52-in. decks. *Exmark.com*



Scag Power Equipment

Despite its compact size, the V-Ride boasts many full-sized features, like hydraulic oil coolers, dual 10cc hydraulic pump and dual 12ci motor drive system, coil-suspension platform, and a heavy-duty steel main frame. The series pairs a powerful 20-, 24- or 26-hp Kawasaki FX commercial-grade engine with a 36-in. Advantage or a 48- or 52-in. Velocity Plus deck. Features include a low center of gravity and extra-large drive tires. The operator comfort pad is fully adjustable to 12 different positions to fit a wide range of operator sizes and riding styles. *Scag.com*

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Toro

The line of GrandStand stand-on mowers now includes 36-, 40- and 60-in. models. The 36- and 40-in. models offer the compact size necessary to pass through gates and tight space, while the 60-in. model allows contractors to make quicker work of larger properties. All models are equipped with a 7-gauge-steel, Turbo Force cutting deck, which produces the quality after-cut appearance even when mowing long, wet grass. Select models include an adjustable baffle, which allows contractors to fine-tune cutting performance. Toro.com/professional



Great Dane

According to the manufacturer, the Great Dane Surfer commercial stand-on mower is quicker and more efficient than a walk-behind, and less expensive than a riding mower. With a 19-hp engine, the Surfer is available with a 34-, 48- or 52-in. fixed deck. The compact design offers zero-turn maneuverability, while the Thermoplastic Elastomer Spring Package operator platform system provides a cushion for superior comfort. An aluminum hydrostat reservoir improves heat dissipation. GreatDaneMowers.com



Gravely

The Gravely Pro-Stance stand-on mower is available in five different models. It gives an unobstructed view from nearly every angle and is easy to maneuver in confined spaces. Made of 7-gauge steel with fully fabricated and welded construction, the optimum operator position promotes stability on hills and uneven terrain. With a Kawasaki KAI gas engine, Hydro-Gear 10cc pumps and 12 cu. in. wheel motors, Pro-Stance travels at 9 mph forward ground speed. Gravely.com

Wright Commercial Products

The company that invented the stand-on mower presents its newly improved Stander for 2010. Available with a 48-, 52- or 61-in. deck, the new unit incorporates a suspension platform to provide a smooth ride, and a full-length, thigh-to-knee pad to improve comfort and reduce fatigue. The new spindle, designed for low maintenance and longevity, has a labyrinth style seal, ball bearings, and a 1-in. through-bolt shaft. With cut speeds up to 9.5 mph, it still maintains control and traction for even steep terrain. And with no seat, seat belts or arm rests, the operator can just step off in case of emergency or to pick up debris; the mower will stop immediately. WrightMfg.com

continued on page 47

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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

LMREPORTS

continued from page 45

DESIGN BUILD: HARDSCAPES & ACCESSORIES

LifeTime Composites LLC

LifeTime Lumber is an easy-to-use wood alternative that weighs in at 25% lighter than other lumber composite products. Made from mineral ash and urethanes, it's naturally fire resistant and cost-effectively meets the strictest fire codes like those for State of California Wildland-Urban Interface (WUI) and San Diego County. As a deck, dock and fence material, it won't rot, is impervious to pests and does not support mold and mildew. LifeTime Lumber is made from 65% recycled material, reducing the need for logging, emits no toxicity and uses less energy to manufacture than other composites. LifetimeLumber.com

Rosetta Hardscapes

The new Rosetta Belvedere Collection combines the look and feel of natural weathered stone with the dimensional consistency of concrete blocks. Test marketing has shown that it can be installed in less than half the

time relative to natural stone, with dimensional consistency being the key difference. Molded from 64 natural stone faces on eight block sizes. Like

the Rosetta Outcropping Collection, the variety of block sizes and textures gives finished walls a natural, random look. Belvedere blocks range from 10 to 70 lbs., and in 3- and 6-in. heights. They are finished on four sides, and can be customized based on the natural surroundings of a site — including corners and curves. DiscoverRosetta.com/belvedere



Landscape Timesavers

Designed by a registered landscape architect, Channel Guard allows users to easily disperse water from the downspouts to prevent erosion near a building. No more moving downspout extensions to mow, no more worrying about frozen or plugged drain tiles. With its solid channel design and unique top lock connecting system, it also prevents weeds. ChannelGuard.net

Dunis Stone Inc.

The new Granite Bollard Collection was created by fine art sculptor Miles Dunis and includes more than 40 stone selections. The bollards are fabricated with a hollow core and easily installed over 4-, 6- or 8-in. steel pipe. They can be ordered in all custom sizes and fabricated as fence posts, rail supports, gate posts or with fittings for chains. DunisStone.com



BETTER RESULTS



4-Speed™ XT Saves Contracts

APPLICATION RATE:

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

APPLICATION EQUIPMENT:

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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Recover lost time using tracking tools

Is your business stuck in a rut? Are you getting to the end of the day faster than you get to the end of your to-do list? Are interruptions and distractions your constant companions?

Keeping productivity high is a constant uphill battle, with frequent plateaus and occasional drop-offs. What you need are tools to keep you moving forward and on track.

Recently, I've been working with several companies dedicated to using Kaizen principles in their businesses. For those of you new to Japanese business management philosophies, kaizen means "improvement" in Japanese. It refers to the practice of continuous improvement in all aspects of your business. Kaizen is implemented through activities such as measuring performance, standardizing business processes, eliminating waste, and improving employees' skills and abilities.

What draws me to Kaizen more than anything else is the focus on measurable outcomes — and the resulting feedback loop it creates in a business. I'm reminded of one of my favorite quotes, by Thomas S. Monson: "When performance is measured, performance improves. When performance is measured and reported back, the rate of improvement accelerates." As a technical guy, I can see how technology can be a big help in these areas. This month, I have a couple of tools

to help you monitor and measure your personal and business productivity.

RescueTime.com

Tracking your time on daily tasks and projects traditionally has meant keeping a "time journal" of your daily activities. If you're like me, the level of effort spent keeping track of time seems to outweigh any benefits. But with RescueTime, my computer keeps track for me. RescueTime runs in the background and measures which application, Web site or document is actively being used. It can alert you when you exceed time goals, helps categorize

time spent away from your computer, and will even block certain Web sites or applications during self-imposed "focus time."

Aside from the powerful analytics and insights you'll gain from tracking your personal tasks, the real advantage comes from using the business version of RescueTime. Called Empower, this module lets you track all of your employees and gives them the ability to see their own productivity in comparison to the rest of the team. RescueTime has the right task-tracking philosophy: Let the actions record themselves.

Xobni.com

I hate to admit it, but I spend a lot of my day reading and writing emails. While I would like to think I can quit any time, the truth is I'm addicted.

Measuring my daily email activities is easy with Xobni (which you might already have noticed is "inbox" spelled backward). It's a personal productivity plug-in for Outlook that enables you to find emails, connect your contacts to social networks and stay in touch better.

But once again, it's the email analytics feature that is really the most interesting part of the solution. It helps you analyze your own email behavior, understand whom you email most, and identify what time of day you send the most email. Measuring the impact of even the mildest email addiction can lead to recovery. Try using Xobni to curb your habit.

The first step in improving your business productivity is learning where you're spending time. Gaining an accurate view of the workday can help you make more meaningful and informed business

decisions.

Who knows: You might find hours of productive time by eliminating distractions and busy work.



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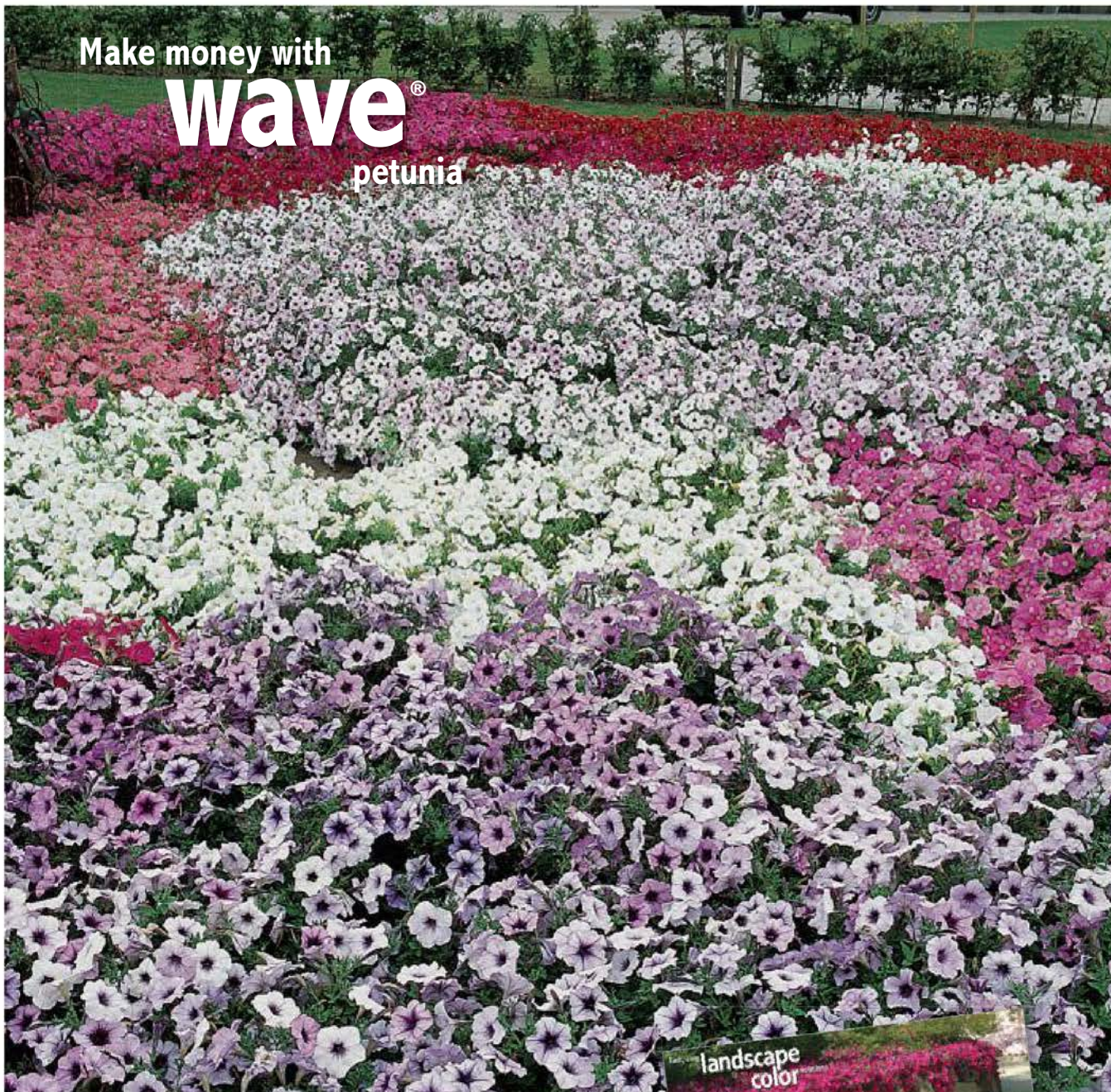
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Long-term LANDSCAPING

HOMEOWNERS WANT COLORFUL PERENNIALS, SHRUBS, AND ORNAMENTALS THAT WILL PROVIDE INTEREST FOR YEARS TO COME.

BY LESLIE KIRK AND DON EBERLY

THE DEMAND FOR professional landscape installations continues to shift as more homeowners and commercial property owners look to purchase long-term investments in addition to seasonal color with annuals. In order to adapt to this changing market and keep profits steady, professional landscapers and designers are looking to colorful perennials and shrubs to meet this need.

Anticipating this shift, growers have placed a strong focus on introducing blooming and foliage perennials that provide color and combination options more like annuals, with hardy characteristics.

Lasting benefits

Quality perennials, shrubs and ornamental grasses offer long-term value. Once these plants are established, they provide better resistance to wind, rain and drought, and can extend the display period. However, designing a successful perennial landscape involves longer planning and a better understanding of what clients are hoping to gain from the installation.

"No other group of plants can return the rewards of long life, re-bloom and seasonal interest," says Dan Heims, president of Terra

Nova Nurseries, Portland, OR. "When starting a plan, spend some time in research. Ask yourself, 'What level maintenance do these plants require?' and 'How long does this plant bloom?'"

When installing perennials, it is essential for landscapers to pair plants with similar nutrient and water needs to maximize resources and allow more flexibility of space. As with trees and large shrubs, landscapers should research the mature size and spread of each perennial they choose. This will help ensure the design remains cohesive and successful after several years.

"Use selections that offer the longest possible period of interest, color, fragrance, movement and texture," says David Wilson, marketing director for Overdeveest Nurseries and Garden Splendor, a line of perennials for the Northeast and Mid-Atlantic regions.

Both Heims and Wilson recommend multi-use perennials that provide both functionality and beauty. For example, some of the newest selections of dianthus, ajuga, echinacea, and sedums offer designers hardy, colorful options with improved heat and humidity resistance.

As consumers look for ways to stretch a budget, four-season landscapes that transition from year to year become an important selling point. Most clients also hope for installations that are low-maintenance and sustainable.

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While there may be more up-front cost for superior perennials, landscapers have found that the promise of a longer-lasting installation allows them to sell to customers. An installation with long-term success can also often lead to higher customer satisfaction, and thus a long-term relationship with larger potential for future sales.

"Use premium quality, market-ready perennials to create instant color and effect for the customer," says Wilson. "Getting off to a good start with high-quality plants may cost a little more, but this will be offset by the customer's reaction at the job completion and is likely to generate far more future referrals."

One trend Heims recently uncovered is that more homeowners are finding satisfaction in seeing a landscape grow to full maturity and remain successful. Landscape designers can find ways to lower initial costs by researching whether large plugs or quarts can be used in lieu of gallons, suggests Heims. "With irrigation, it's quite easy to grow plants to maturity quickly."

Other trendy ways to incorporate perennials include sustainable, eco-friendly designs, vertical gardening, and edible gardens with perennials as the season anchor.

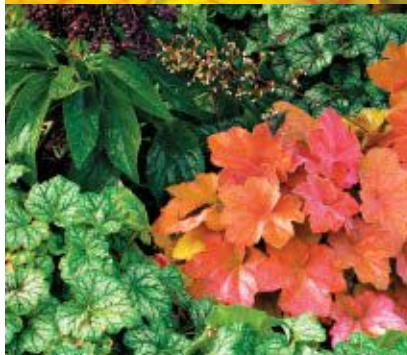
Foliage Effect

In the past year, foliage gardens have become one of the most popular trends among homeowners, allowing landscapers to explore new plant material and stretch creatively into a new mode of design.

While a broad range of colors and textures in foliage perennials, shrubs and grasses have not always been available, breeders have spent a great deal of time cultivating new varieties that provide designers with combination options similar to annuals and blooming perennials.

"In my 20 years of design, maintenance and construction, I have found customers want color," says Heims. "I only dreamed of the palette of foliage

Selecting perennials that offer functionality and color can help add to the landscape's overall value and long-term success. *Heuchera 'Electra'* has color variation, four-season interest, heat and humidity tolerance, and white flowers in spring.



Combining shrubs, grasses and perennials in variations of one color, such as green, can act as a baseline for a single bold color to create an instant focal point.

plants that is available today. Many plants like *Heuchera* have such bright foliage, that they substitute for flowers, have seasonal color changes, and offer low-maintenance."

Foliage is all about leaf shapes, vein colors and outlines, textures and flow. Combinations are often subtle and focus on creating a mood, drawing the eye forward, and creating dimension in the space. For long-term foliage designs, keep in mind that it is important to use stockier, compact varieties, as these do not need staking and tying, and only require minimal maintenance and upkeep, says Wilson.

Because common foliage colors include variations of blues, greens and deep reds, a soothing design concept is often used by landscape designers. To achieve

Colorful blooming perennials (top) can be used in areas such as containers, garden beds and borders, raised beds, and cutting gardens.

this delicate ambiance, it is best to use strong textural contrasts to insight supplemental interest instead of bright colors. A mix of matte and velvet-like foliage may be best for this style, with combinations of smooth and serrated edges.

Begonias, lamb's ears and thymes are also excellent options for providing textures, as many of these come with fuzzy leaves. Colors such as silver, auburn, russet and deep green in foliage landscapes will also add sense of design diversity without over-complicating the design.

By choosing light colors such as yellows, chartreuse, bright reds and greens, a foliage garden will take on a more vibrant energy. When trying to make an impact, pair several bright- and true-green foliage varieties of different textures in an area with one or two unusual foliage colors. Complementing a heavy green palette with plants of crimson or wine will become an instant focal point. 🌿

Leslie Kirk is a public relations manager/writer and Don Eberly is president/CEO at Eberly & Collard Public Relations, www.eberlycollardpr.com.



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Perennial Plant Association

Blue false indigo (*Baptisia australis*) is the **Perennial Plant Association's 2010** Perennial Plant of the Year. It grows 3 to 4

ft. tall and 3 to 4 ft. wide in an upright habit. It grows across a wide range of zones and is one of the most adaptable native species. Newly emerging shoots produce violet-blue, lupine-like flowers in erect 10- to 12-in. racemes atop flower stems, extending well above the foliage mound of clover-like, trifoliolate, bluish-green leaves. The spring flowers are present for three to four weeks. The flowers give way to inflated seed pods, which turn to an ornamental charcoal black when ripe. PerennialPlant.org



In Coleus we trust

Ball Horticultural Co.'s low-maintenance Trusty Rusty *Coleus* shines everywhere it's planted, and its large copper leaves are outlined in golden yellow. It is a vigorous and versatile plant and superior performer. Pairing with complementary varieties adds height, texture and contrast to combination plantings in both sun and shade. A free Landscape Resource CD about this and other Ball plants is available online at Ball's Web site. BallLandscape.com

Delicious 'dragons

New Aromas Intermediate Snapdragons were bred by **Goldsmith Seeds** for spring sales. Because they're very receptive to plant growth regulators, they're also cost-efficient. In the garden, the fragrant, well-branched plants produce numerous strong stems that resist lodging. They are available in seven colors (including French Vanilla, pictured) and a mixture. The upright plants reach 24 to 30 in. tall and spread 12 to 14 in. They bloom in spring and summer in relatively cool-weather areas, and in winter and spring in warm winter, hot summer areas. GoldsmithSeeds.com



Make a splash

The vigorous, variegated *Acanthus* Whitewater PPAF PVR from **Terra Nova** has striking, bold leaves with white margins and "splashing." It makes a large clump with 4- to 5-ft.-tall ornamental flower stalks of pink and cream in summer. This was bred with *A. Summer Beauty* for vigor, more hardiness, and heat and humidity tolerance. It is tolerant of most soils, but prefers the soil to be deep, fertile, moist and well-drained. TerraNovaNurseries.com



Beauty for a cause

Not only is Invincibelle Spirit the Holy Grail of the first pink mop-head *Hydrangea arborescens*, but it is also dedicated to help raise money for breast cancer research. Proven Winners is dedicated to raise at least \$1 million, with \$1 donated to the Breast Cancer Research Foundation for each Invincibelle Spirit sold. This new "Annabelle" **Proven Winners ColorChoice** is particularly special because its flowers emerge a dark, hot pink color and mature to a rich clear pink. As a continuous bloomer, it produces new mop-head flowers from early summer until frost for a grand and beautiful seasonal display. ProvenWinners.com



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A goodbye letter

Dear Grandma,

I talked to Mom a little while ago. She wants me to give you permission to let go. The hospice nurse made the suggestion. You haven't had anything to eat or drink in a few days, so they've placed you in "crisis care" — which means they are making you as comfortable as possible.

Each of your six grandchildren was asked to call and let you know everything will be OK, that we'll be there to take care of our mothers, your three daughters. You don't need to worry about them anymore. We'll be there to take care of them and one another. That's one of the things you showed us all over the years: the importance of family. You were there for the births of your grandchildren and great-grandchildren, and have helped guide each of us from the very day he (or she) entered this world.

I remember when our son Josh was born. You and Mom arrived at the house, and you waited impatiently while Marci was upstairs nursing him. When Marci came down, you swept Josh out of his mother's arms and just stared at him, completely ignoring Marci. We laugh about it now, how absorbed you were in that skinny little baby. That skinny little kid is going to college next year.

It's ironic. At the beginning and end of our lives, we need so much care. We can do so little for ourselves. I'm happy your daughters, my mom and two aunts, all followed you to Florida. You were able to spend so many good years together. I liked hearing stories about "Girls' Night Out" because I knew that meant you were all able to spend time together. And they're there with you, now.



(left to right) My Aunt Aline, Grandmother Sarah, Aunt Sharon, and Mother Gloria.

That gives me hope. As Josh leaves next year and his sister Sammie a few years after that, these are the last few months we'll all be under the same roof as a family. I'm not ready for that. But it gives me hope that some day, despite their grand plans and adventures — if we have been able to instill the sense of family values you passed on to your daughters, who in turn handed them to us — then perhaps we'll all spend more than the occasional holiday together.

And I suppose that was your greatest gift. I don't know how many times my mother told me (and you probably told her), "Wait until you have children of your own. Then you'll understand." ... Now, I do.

After several years as a parent, including a couple of stints as a stay-at-home dad, I tried to ask Mom how I could ever repay her for the hardship and pain (and hopefully a lot of joy, too) of raising me. She said, in essence, do a good job raising your children. That validates what she did to raise hers.

I'm trying. My children are unfinished, and for that matter, so am I. But I think they're on the right path. I have Mom to thank for that, and of course you.

Others might stake their legacies on fame or wealth. But for me, the simple values you instilled in your family are the most valuable gifts you've ever shared. So, it's OK to let go. Let your suffering end. We're here to take care of each other.

Love,
Danny

EDITOR'S NOTE:

The author's grandmother was diagnosed with pancreatic cancer a few months ago. She was put on hospice care in February and passed away less than an hour after this article was completed.

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ACUTABOVE

GREEN INDUSTRY MAINTENANCE LEADERS » BY DAN JACOBS

Over the past 40 years, Mission Landscape Cos. has become one of the largest landscape companies in the industry. Since its inception, the enterprise has added services and now comprises seven separate entities covering all aspects of the Green Industry. Five years ago, the Irvine, CA-based enterprise began operating as an employee stock ownership plan. President and CEO **David DuBois** discusses how his company remains a maintenance leader.



Mission Landscape's David DuBois views obstacles as opportunities.

INSIDE INFO

Company: Mission Landscape Cos.

Headquarters: Irvine, CA

Year founded: 1970

Employees: 500+

Annual revenue: \$26 million

Web site:
MissionLandscape.com

Key to being a Maintenance Leader: Staying on top of the company's vision, cash and culture, and always building our brand.

TOP TRENDS

» **Can you hear us now?** We are increasing in the type and frequency of communications. Because clients have reduced staff levels and support and are wearing more hats today, it's often more difficult to reach them. Investing in the appropriate communications and reporting technology — and in the training to aid our staff — has provided very positive feedback from our clients, proving us to be a timely and informative resource for them.

» **Liquid gold.** Water management continues to grow in interest, as a result of regulation, price increases and media attention to California's escalating water shortage. It ranges from installing smart controllers and low-precipitation nozzles to utilizing drip systems with clients wanting to understand their overall impact and value. Conducting thorough irrigation audits with detailed solutions that help save money and increase returns on investments also have become very popular.

» **More mulch.** Renovating landscape with indigenous and drought-tolerant plants, and removing ground covers and replacing them with topper mulch, are both becoming commonplace. Especially in older, mature landscapes, the mulch really helps enhance property appearance — providing a welcomed facelift and saving water along the way.

TOP OBSTACLES

» **The speed of change.** Keeping up with the volume and speed of change in governmental regulations to finance and human resources is the first obstacle. Adapting our business, and then the rate at which we need to communicate changes to our clients for implementation, are other key challenges. Many industry

colleagues share their comments on how things "used to be" and how much has changed. This reinforces my belief that we need to continue to focus on changes in management, as change will only become faster and more furious in the future. There will be some good companies in our industry that will disappear as a result of being caught off guard and not able to react quickly enough to some of these changes.

TOP OPPORTUNITIES

» **Property partners.** There are many challenges right now that can all be looked at as opportunities, such as commercial properties experiencing higher vacancies. Meeting with clients to assist with leasing needs of their properties not only has reinforced and strengthened our relationships, but has allowed us to propose upgrades that help make the site more appealing while reducing the owners' costs. Smart property owners know doing the right thing for their clients and sites will increase their occupancy rates and reputations, while adding value to their properties.

» **Going green.** The growing demands for all things green and sustainable — from water management, rain harvesting, erosion control, organic soil amendments and pest control, as well as recycling and integrated plant health care — can lead to additional business for the maintenance industry.

» **Tech advantage.** Technology with product, customer relationship management and sales forecasting, communications and accounting — and even hybrid lawn mowers — all have come so far to help the landscape maintenance industry better serve our clients' needs.

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DON'T BE CAUGHT OFF GUARD BY cultural issues

Your Hispanic employees' attitudes and approaches to work can create some on-the-job challenges. BY **BARBARA MULHERN**

PICTURE YOURSELF IN this situation: You have an all-Hispanic or nearly all-Hispanic crew. One of the crewmembers isn't pulling his weight. But you don't find out about it until you personally visit one of his job sites — or, you don't find out about it at all.

"We'll put these guys (Hispanic workers) together on crews," says Maria Anaya, a bilingual Latina woman who serves as a liaison between Spanish-speaking workers and management at Kujawa Enterprises Inc. (KEI) in Oak Creek, WI.

"They'll never come to us and say: 'He's not doing what he needs to be doing,'" Anaya says. "Instead, another guy will pick up the slack. It's almost a code of honor among the crews. We have to go out and watch them to see who's working and who isn't."

Understanding your Hispanic workers' cultures not only will improve relationships; it also makes good business sense.

Potential barriers

Here are some additional cultural issues you may come across that can be barriers to effective communication and/or safe work practices:

➤ **Risk-taking.** Risk-taking is viewed as the norm in certain countries such as Mexico, particularly among young Hispanic males. In one incident in California, a 19-year-old Mexican native who had been doing landscaping

continued on page 62



When training your Hispanic workers, closely watch their facial expressions to see if they really understand. Then have them repeat back to you what they just learned.

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HISPANIC EMPLOYEES



Maria Anaya assists Tom Jurasinski, a manager at Kujawa Enterprises, Inc. (KEI), with some documents needing to be explained to employee Abel Chairez. Anaya understands the cultural issues that could inhibit effective communication between KEI management and the company's native Spanish-speaking workers.

continued from page 60

decided the work wasn't as "daring" as climbing trees. One day, while scaling a 50-ft. palm tree, a weave of dead fronds came loose, pinning him to the safety belt that held him to the tree. His friends, who watched him being asphyxiated, told the media the reason he liked climbing trees was to show everyone how "brave" he was.

► **Pleasing the boss.** Many Hispanic workers have a strong desire to please the boss, which can be good and bad. "They will go above and beyond what they need to do. They are always afraid of not having a job. If there's a massive branch that needs to be cut, they'll cut it down no matter what it takes — even if it's not safe," Anaya says.

► **Lack of direct eye contact.** Direct eye contact with a person "in authority" is considered disrespectful in many Hispanic cultures. One problem this can cause is if a supervisor is leading a training session, without direct eye contact he might not be able to tell whether the trainees understood what he said.

► **Fear of institutions.** This might include a fear of doctors, police, emer-

gency rescue personnel and the government in general. In the case of workers from Mexico, Anaya says, because government "is threatening to them there, they come here having that same fear. They assume that our government will be exactly the same."

Family first

One major issue within Hispanic cultures that you can use to your advantage in communicating with your workers is a strong emphasis on "family." Whenever possible, frame messages to your Hispanic workers in terms of family.

For example, if you are trying to get them to wear their safety glasses, instead of saying: "Wear your safety glasses so you don't lose an eye," instead say: "Wear your safety glasses so you will be able to see your children grow up." Or, instead of saying: "If you don't use fall protection equipment, you could fall out of that tree and die," say: "If you fall out of that tree and break your back, who will provide for your family in the future?"

Also, instead of telling them: "We don't want you to get injured," say: "We

want you go home uninjured to your family every night."

Finally, take a few minutes to ask your Hispanic workers how their spouses or children are doing when you greet them at the start of the workday. Even if you only know a little Spanish, make the effort to use a few Spanish words when you ask this — and be sure to greet them by name.

5 management tips:

► **Understand your role.** Your Hispanic workers are likely to nod their heads "yes" indicating they understand — even when they don't. This is part of the strong desire to please the boss. One way to work around this is to carefully watch their facial expressions. Then have them either repeat back to you or demonstrate to you what they just learned.

► **Work hard to build trust.** Regularly praise your workers for jobs well done. Recognize them in front of their peers. "We try to build trust with them first. Communication gets better with trust," Anaya says. "We welcome them,

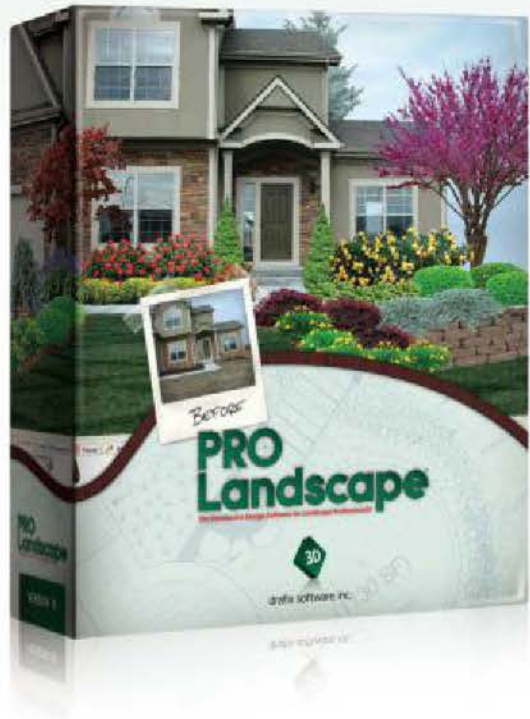
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HISPANIC EMPLOYEES

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try to get to know them, and make them feel like they are part of our company right away.”

› **Respect your workers’ cultures.** Celebrate holidays such as Cinco de Mayo (the Fifth of May — a holiday celebrated in Mexico that commemorates the 1862 victory by Mexican forces

over French soldiers). Have your native Mexican workers bring in food to share from their culture.

› **Train your workers on the importance of emergency personnel.** Help them so they are not afraid to seek assistance from firefighters, police or emergency medical technicians (EMTs) when needed. In one instance in Wisconsin,

two Hispanic workers drowned after a canoe capsized on a golf course pond. Although EMTs arrived several minutes after receiving the call, co-workers initially sent them to the wrong side of the pond. Investigators believed that part of the problem was the Hispanic co-workers’ fears of talking with uniformed officers and rescue personnel.

› **Have a bilingual supervisor accompany ill or injured workers to the doctor.**

This is important so the supervisor can help translate English into Spanish and so the supervisor can tell the doctor about your company’s light-duty program. However, it is also important to help allay your Hispanic workers’ fears. **LM**

MULHERN, a Belleville, WI-based freelance writer, can be reached at bamu100@aol.com.

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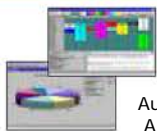
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Do you have multiple personalities?

In 2004, archaeologists digging in Israel unearthed the earliest evidence to date of the controlled use of fire — charred wood and seeds — at a site dating back 790,000 years. At least one academic believes this pivotal use of fire originated in part thanks to the proliferation of multiple personalities.

“I believe fire was discovered by a group of extroverts, cavemen sitting in a group, loudly banging rocks together,” said Dr. Brian Little, a psychology professor, during his keynote speech at the Golf Industry Show in San Diego Feb. 10. “After the extroverts discovered fire, however, I believe it was the introverts who, one by one, quietly kept the fire going.”

Little, a Distinguished Research Professor Emeritus at Carleton University in Ottawa, Ontario, Canada, kicked off his address with a 10-question personality quiz. Green Industry professionals were asked to rate themselves on a scale of 1 to 10, with 10 being the highest score, for each question.

To give you an overall sense of the pop quiz (and Little’s wit), one question was, “Are you a fast-paced person? ... If you’re still thinking about this one, go ahead and give yourself a low score.”

I scored a 64 out of 100. Go figure, I’m an extrovert. I scored well under 100 because sometimes I flex beyond my biological wiring, according to Little.

Based on certain cultural settings and projects I’m committed to, I exhibit introverted tendencies sometimes.

“This is just a baseline quiz — don’t tell people your scores,” Little said in a surprisingly serious tone.

“*Uh-oh, too late,*” I thought to myself.

Then after a five-second pause, Little chuckled and said, “Just kidding. We all know the extroverts immediately shared their scores with the introverts seated beside them, while the introverts haven’t even disclosed their scores to themselves.”

Find the right mix

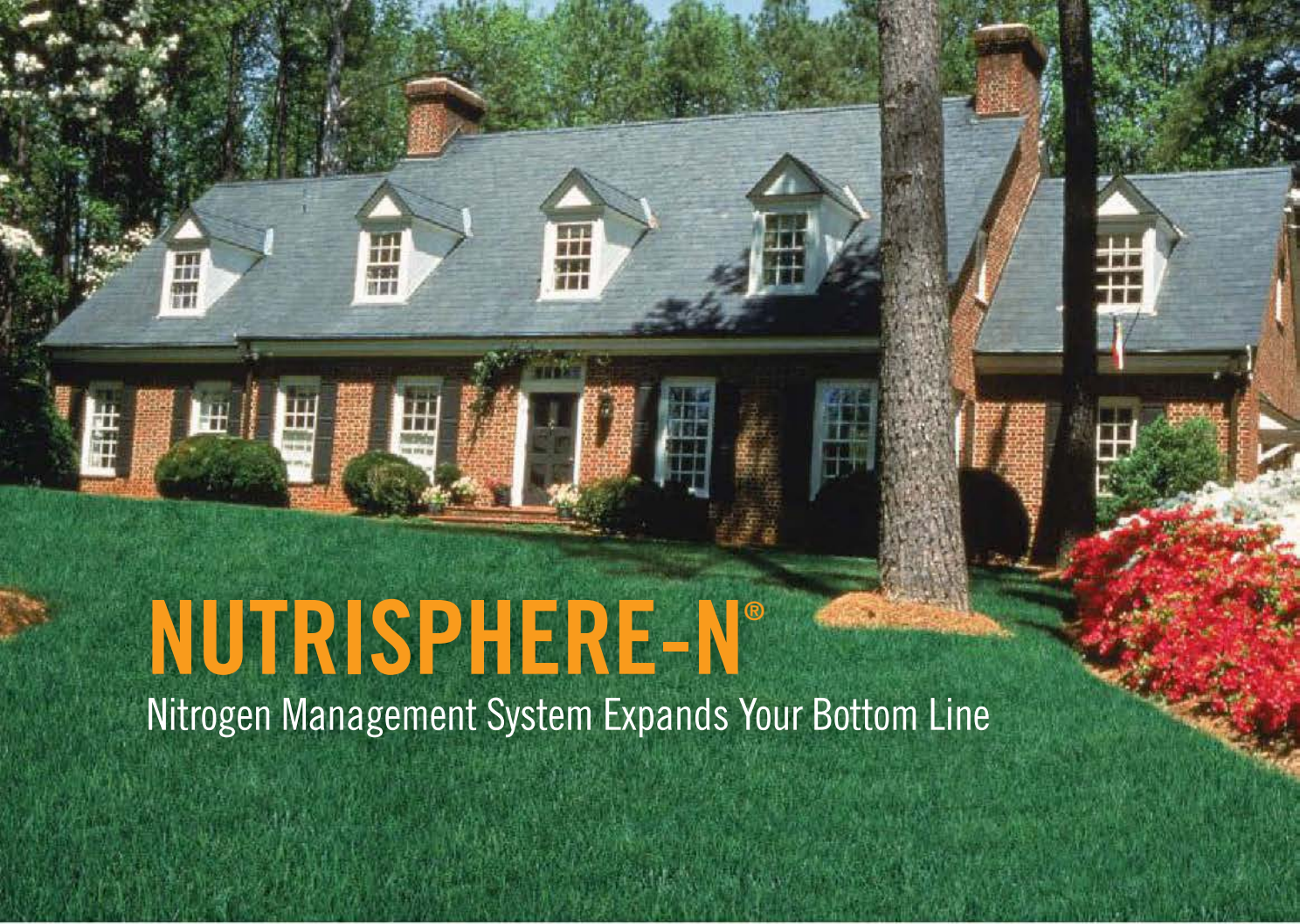
When hiring and developing people and forming internal teams, remember: You can’t always judge a book by its cover. Little, who has delivered more than 700 keynote speeches, is a self-admitted closet introvert.

A few introvert-versus-extrovert generalities, according to the psych professor, include:

- ▶ Introverts are marathoners; extroverts are sprinters: “An extrovert might say, ‘I’m the fastest brain surgeon in the country. What more do you want?’ And the extrovert might not think for a minute that his rushing might be the problem,” Little said.
 - ▶ “When extroverts say, ‘I need a cup of coffee,’ they aren’t kidding. A little caffeine really helps extroverts kick it into gear,” Little said. “On the other hand, coffee can hinder the performance of introverts, particularly if they’re tackling quantitative, timed tasks.”
 - ▶ Extroverts learn better in engaging, humorous, hands-on, group settings. Introverts, meanwhile, find those types of environments stifling, and prefer more traditional, classroom-type training. “You can almost hear the introverts whispering to themselves in kindergarten, ‘I can sit as still as a statue ... na-na, na-na, na-na ... And I’m gonna be an accountant,’” Little said.
- “We desperately need both introverts and extroverts within our organizations,” Little said. “It’s a matter of survival, not just success. Mankind would be extinct without such diverse personalities. The key is getting everyone to accept their inherent personality differences, and then taking full advantage of your organization’s multiple personalities.”

“We desperately need both introverts and extroverts within our organizations. It’s a matter of survival, not just success. Mankind would be extinct without such diverse personalities.” — DR. BRIAN LITTLE





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