



CEO Burt Sperber explains the ValleyCrest way as part of a site visit to the company's Las Vegas offices.

EXECUTIVE

It's a sustainable world; we're just living in it.

BY DANIEL G. JACOBS MANAGING EDITOR

Sustainability.

Get used to the word. You'll be hearing it a lot more. In fact, if you haven't already, it's probably because you haven't been paying attention.

Whether it's developing a sustainable business model or adopting "more green" business practices, "sustainability" was a theme thread throughout the Professional Landcare Network's (PLANET's) Executive Forum held in Las Vegas in February.

It might seem ironic to hold a conference dealing with sustainability in a city known for excess, but presenters repeated the theme throughout the event. And the event's 270 attendees, including 70 first-timers, were presented with a wealth of information from Green Industry veterans, consultants and a well-regarded economist.

A tour of the top

The folks of ValleyCrest Landscape Cos. do a lot of things well. Perhaps most important is founder, chairman and CEO Burt Sperber's ability to adapt to fit the changing needs of clients. And that hasn't changed in the company's 60-year history.

"Burt doesn't do anything small," says Tom Donnelly, president of ValleyCrest Landscape Development, a division of ValleyCrest Cos., perfectly describing the site visit hosted by the company's Las Vegas office.

With nearly \$1 billion in revenue in 2009 and almost 10,000 employees in 112 offices, ValleyCrest gave Executive Forum attendees an insider's glimpse of one of the Green Industry's largest operations. Those who participated in the facility tour got to hear about how the company continues to evolve. ValleyCrest has embraced the sustainable movement, examining its supply chain and business practices, as well as the expected outcomes.

"We're a little behind the curve," explains Kelly Duke, ValleyCrest's vice president of pre-construction. Duke says sustainability is achieved when the company meets its environmental, social and economic goals.

One concern many people have about sustainability is the perceived expense associated with it, but Duke argues that "sustainable practices need not be a cost."



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FORUM

More and more customers are asking to see documentation of companies sustainable practices. If an organization can't prove its sustainable approach, it might never get the job.

Before making any move, ValleyCrest does benchmarking for the current practice. Next comes a cost/benefit assessment. Then, realistic goals are created.

Economic outlook

Economic Futurist Jeff Thredgold offered Executive Forum attendees his rundown of the economic outlook. And in his words, things are looking up.

"We have endured the longest, deepest, most costly, most painful, the most pervasive recession in our lives," Thredgold says, "But we have returned to growth, and that will pay dividends in your industry."

According to Thredgold, there are seven critical industries to the U.S. and world economies: technology, transportation, telecommunications, financial services, energy, entertainment and biomedicine. There also are three guaranteed growth industries: healthcare, financial planning and leisure/entertainment.

Looking ahead

"Change is inevitable; growth is optional," says Jim McCutcheon, CEO and partner with Atlanta-based High-Grove Partners.

McCutcheon chaired PLANET's Crystal Ball Committee, which this year focused its efforts on sustainability. The result was the 29th Crystal Ball Report, "Green Industry Economics: Innovating Toward a Sustainable and Profitable Future," penned by *Landscape Management* Editor-at-Large Ron Hall.

The question for Green Industry

business owners is whether they will embrace change or get run over by it.

It doesn't have to be difficult, and you don't have to work from scratch," McCutcheon says. "I'm a strong believer in R&D — rob and duplicate."

To order a copy of PLANET's Crystal Ball Report #29, visit the *LM* bookstore at: <http://shop.landscapemanagement.net/shop.php>. **LM**



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