

Golf's U.S. Open was in Pebble Beach, CA. **Bill Davids**, president of Clarence Davids & Co., and his team hopped on a plane and headed west. They didn't go to watch professionals play the famed golf shrine. Davids and his team were there to landscape the corporate hospitality area, the main entrance promenade and the merchandise pavilion. "The U.S. Open was in Chicago at Olympia Fields (Country Club) in 2003," Davids says. "We won the contract, and we've been doing it ever since."

LM recently spoke with the second-generation owner to discuss changes in maintenance.

TOP TRENDS

» **Environmental concerns.** We've seen a move to more natural landscapes. Instead of trying to mow everything, we're having some areas utilize more natural plantings or a lower mow turf mix. There seems to be a desire to be more environmental — using fewer chemicals and less water. We have a commitment to being good stewards of the land and to create natural sustaining environments. The goal of the new generation of landscapers is to use fewer chemicals, less water and become more natural.

» **New technology.** We use equipment to maximize our labor. An example is stand-on mowers. Any type of newer equipment that saves labor and is better for the environment (e.g. uses less fuel, etc.) — all those things are taken into account when we do our purchasing.

» **Equipment maintenance.** There is a return there. We utilize our equipment for several years. When equipment gets a certain number of hours, we are ready to trade it in. We have full-service mechanics, and we service all our own equipment. We keep our equipment a long time and keep it in good condition.

TOP OBSTACLES

» **The economy.** Lower budgets are caused by a poor economy. Even on the Gold Coast, in downtown Chicago, they're seeing the impact. If one or two \$1 million condos in a building are in foreclosure, that throws the whole budget off. The management

The Clarence Davids & Co. team.



INSIDE INFO

Company: Clarence Davids & Co.

Headquarters: Matteson, IL

Founded: 1951

Branches: 3

Employees: nearly 75 full-time (200 seasonal)

2009 revenue: \$18 million

LM Top 150 Ranking: No. 68

Key to being a maintenance leader: Communication with the client. Find out what their priorities are. Your priorities are going to be different than their highest priorities. Without that communication, you're going to be going one way, and they're thinking something else.

company has less money to run the building, and eventually it trickles down to landscaping. We're doing fewer services for less money. Bottom line, it affects our sales.

» **The government.** The biggest intrusion in Chicago is prevailing wage. The prevailing wage law for Illinois does not recognize landscaping as a profession, so they don't recognize our rates. They throw us in this category with highway workers, which is five times our current wage. The state has no money, but they continue with these outdated laws that are confusing and counter productive. We've made a decision to no longer bid prevailing wage jobs.

TOP OPPORTUNITIES

» **Cross-selling.** Design/build is still a strong sales tool. It gives the landscape maintenance

contractor a very creative way to add sales and benefit their maintenance clients. We can redesign certain parts of a client's property or redesign an old, tired landscape or an entryway. It gives us that creative edge over a pure maintenance contractor. Design sales are down, but it's imperative we continue to use it to benefit our clients.

» **H2O.** There is opportunity in how we need to capture rainwater. We need to begin designing and installing underground tanks for the storage and reuse of that water in the landscape. We continue to look at technology. I see that as key in years to come.

» **Innovation.** There are a lot of new plants out there that have been improved. Native plants that take less water, less maintenance — they look better longer in the season. We have the ability to redesign areas and take out the problem plants — the older plants that have too many diseases and require too much water and maintenance.

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