

James River Grounds Management is the largest privately held provider of landscape management services in the central Virginia region. The company was formed in 1989 by Ray F. Lazarchic and Michael C. Hildebrand and was sold in 2005 to four members of the management team, **Maria Candler**, president and CEO; Jason Knight, vice president and COO; Todd Pendleton, vice president business development; and James Batterson, director of facilities. *LM* spoke with Candler on how the current leadership deals with today's management issues.



Maria Candler

## TOP TRENDS

› **Quality is no longer the differential.** For so many years we were the "quality" company. That was how we set ourselves apart from our competition. Times are constantly changing. Now it's about being who you need to be to the person you're dealing with in any given moment. We've worked hard to maintain our culture as a quality, relationship driven company. Flexibility however, is what has sustained our success. We are learning each day how we can meet our customers ever-changing needs while still being true to who we are.

› **Do more with less.** I've noticed that these are the days that separate the men from the boys. It's helped us that we are always focusing on what can be eliminated even when times are good. As our costs increase but our customers are paying less, that mentality has really helped us thrive in a down economy. The successful contractors that I talk with regularly have been on a lean business management journey for several years not just in reaction to the marketplace changes.

› **Creativity/flexibility with contracts.** Our ability to be creative and flexible with our pricing and specifications has become increasingly important. We have been a relationship-focused company since the beginning. Lately we have seen that relationship we have built with our customers doesn't give us the benefits it used to. It has at least kept us in the negotiations, which allows us to demonstrate our flexibility and therefore will always remain our focus where customers are concerned.

## TOP OBSTACLES

› **Employee recruiting.** The high unemployment rate has only translated into more applicants who need to be processed but still yield dismal results. It's still very challenging to recruit a

## INSIDE INFO

**Company:** James River Grounds Management

**Website:** www.jrgm.com

**Founded:** 1989

**Headquarters:** Glen Allen, VA

**LM Top 150 Ranking:** 60, with revenue of \$19,760,785

**Employees:** 441 full-time/  
3 part-time

**Key to being a maintenance leader:** A culture of continuous improvement has made a huge impact on our growth. We have never been afraid to change. The day we stop evolving and accept status quo is the day we start shrinking. Another key is sharing our performance goals and actuals with the team. Everyone needs to know where the company is headed and how they fit into the big picture.

legal, stable work force. More and more each year our human resources staff is operating much like our sales team. Hire 10, hope to keep 2. Bid on \$1,000,000, hope to close \$200,000. The up side is that it's forced us to really tighten up on our hiring procedures and look more closely at our staffing benchmarks. We're working with a variety of government agencies to promote our jobs as well as hosting our own job fairs.

› **Government regulations.** Everywhere we turn, legislative changes are causing great challenges. The recent regulatory changes with prevailing wage calculations for the H-2B program, as well as more changes looming on the horizon, could make that program unusable. E-Verify is much closer to reaching the end goal of mandatory for all businesses. We watch pesticide and water restrictions closely. As tough as these changes are, there are opportunities attached to each. For example, our irrigation technicians have obtained certifications that exhibit their expertise in effective water management.

They are poised and ready to guide our customers through tough restrictions on water usage.

## TOP OPPORTUNITIES

› **Quality of management team.** For the past two years we have been very focused on the quality of our management team. We buy the same equipment and products as our competitors. We recruit from the same labor pool. The quality of this team is our best opportunity to set ourselves apart. Focusing on this team is how we go from being grass cutters to landscape professionals. We've brought some really great people onto our team in the last few years. We're focused and committed to building a career ladder for them. It's very exciting.