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Investing in my future

Just got back from the bank, where I deposited a hefty sum of money into our checking account. No, it's not my paycheck for serving as editor of this fine publication. First, that's deposited directly into the account, where it lasts about as long as a politician's campaign promise after an election. And second, no one would use the term hefty to describe that amount.

No, the hefty sum is simply residing temporarily in our account before it's shipped off to Washington University in St. Louis to pay for the first semester of Josh's sophomore year (double majoring in economics and computer science, a minor in mathematics, and certification that he's fluent in Chinese — thanks for asking).

Josh, who happens to be interning at our company this year, was with me at the bank (he had his

own check to deposit) and smirked at my regular joke about paying for his college being an investment in my future.

According to the website babycenter.com, given our parameters (region in which we live, income, public vs. private college) the cost of raising Josh to the age of 18 is \$478,802. His 18th birthday is less than a month away, so I think we've pretty much neared that number.

Raising a child is an act of love, not a long-term financial investment. That said, I'm hoping Josh — and his younger sister — remember fondly all the trips, restaurants, video games and sporting events they attended on our dime (not to mention all the cheering and support for their activities).

The hope (returning to my regular joke) is that our investment will pay dividends when we're ready to retire (and maybe even a little sooner) when Josh is out in the workforce earning his own hefty paycheck. We repeat the joke, tongue firmly planted in cheek, mainly to remind him to not take for granted the gifts — both intellectual and financial — he has been given.

And maybe he'll treat his old man and mom to a cruise.

Investing in his future is like investing in your employees' future. You spend money on training and equipment in hopes they'll work more efficiently, which in turn earns you more revenue. OK, so the return on investment is a bit quicker than raising a child, but the principle is the same.

As parents we invest time, energy (a lot of energy) and money into our children in hopes they'll grow into responsible adults. As business owners you invest time, energy and money into your employees in hopes they'll become better, more productive workers.

And who knows, maybe one of those employees will buy you a cruise one day.

Josh and me shortly before he left for his freshman year.



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PROGRESS

Water wise



A flood of high-tech innovations propels irrigators to a new age.

In olden days, people could water to their heart's content without raising the ire of neighbors and city officials. With today's increasing water restrictions, that's not true anymore. Replacing the garden hose of yore are high-tech irrigation tools that are changing the shape of the irrigation industry and the way people water.

"When you're wasting water — watering when it's raining and those sorts of things, it's very visible," says Keith Shepersky, senior product and marketing manager for Irritrol, which in February released a wireless smart controller that adjusts water run times based on weather.

"Those things used to drive the Parks and Rec people crazy. They'd be saying, 'Why are you sprinkling when it's raining?'"

Fortunately for today's irrigators and water conservationists, we don't water when it's raining as much anymore. That's because irrigation is becoming easier to control remotely. Consumers and irrigation workers now can turn sprinklers on and off from the office or install sensors that trigger water only when it's needed.

It's a growing reality that seemed unfathomable in the recent past.

Smart controllers, as those in the industry know, once programmed can adjust water's run time to conform to a plant's daily water needs. Word of their usefulness is spreading. And it's not just the timers.

"Advances in communications technology now allow access to irriga-

tion systems remotely, from anywhere in the world," explains Jeff Kremicki, CID, CIC, Hunter Industries' product marketing manager, citing central control hardware and software that can be added to controllers.

"Today," he says, "a controller can be connected to a customer's computer via a network, Internet, or cellular connection, providing customers complete access to the irrigation scheduling" and alerting them to problems.

Ultimately, smart controllers save water.

"If you go back far enough, Shepersky says, "you see systems where somebody walks out the front door on their porch and reaches down and turns on a sprinkler valve manually.

"And the sprinklers would have multiple heads. And then the guy goes in to watch a ballgame and has no idea that 12-16 gallons a minute is flowing out on that circuit and it's been running across the yard for two hours."

Thanks to smart timers, such waste-fulness isn't as big an issue.

But they're not perfect, says Jeffrey Knight, central region education manager and instructor at Ewing Irrigation.

"Here comes the smart timer and the promises you put in the data and it will measure how much water is in the soil. But it's not that simple," he says.

"I have to give it the soil type. And then I give it the type of heads I'm using. I got to give it the precipitation rate so it knows how fast water's being applied... You have to give it the data and then watch it a couple weeks and

make adjustments. You can't just input the data and forget it."

If there's any flaw in irrigation's new technological products at all, agrees Adolfo Meza, product manager, contractor controllers, for Rain Bird, it's that people need to "use them appropriately to obtain the desired results; along with new technologies should come an understanding of these products and how to use them to gain the ultimate benefit."

Smart controllers aren't the only cutting edge irrigation technology on the market. There are also soil moisture sensors, more uniform nozzles and flow sensors. And those new products do more than conserve water, says Meza. They save customers and workers time and money.

Hunter's Kremicki says flow sensors are useful because they "monitor irrigation system flow and demands, providing the customer with feedback and protection to the site when irrigation system problems occur."

Ultimately, water-saving irrigation technology must and will continue to advance, Shepersky says. Because "we don't get more water than the Earth already has."

Smart controllers like Rain Bird's help conserve water and change the way people irrigate today.



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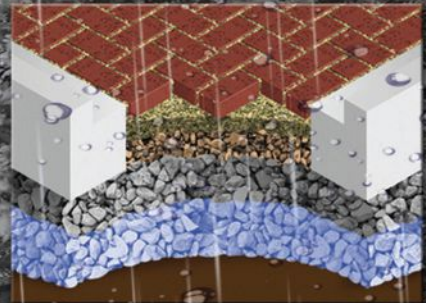


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A leader's winning ways

Winning is hard work, but well worth it, according to Pat Williams, senior vice president of the Orlando Magic.

Speaking to superintendents at the Golf Industry Show (GIS) in February in Orlando, FL, Williams said winning requires both great leadership and a significant investment of time, care and money to recruit, retain and fully develop a true team of all-stars.

"Who doesn't like to win?" Williams asked GIS attendees. "Winning is great fun. And it's contagious."

Equally attractive, Williams promised that once you've put in all that work to establish a winning culture, and you've become (or appointed or groomed) a great leader and assembled a great team, yesterday's work becomes today's fun.

Signed with the Philadelphia Phillies in 1962, Williams made the move from behind the plate (as a Minor League catcher) to the front office (as the Miami Marlins' business manager) in 1964. Spending the past half-century in professional

sports — including helping an NBA dream become a reality for Central Florida with his "Orlando Believes in Magic" campaign — Williams knows all about hard work, and great leaders and teams.

Williams is quick to point out that many of the "winning ways" he's learned came from the home court: He and his wife are the proud parents of 19 all-stars, including 14 adopted from four countries.

Williams' "7 traits of great leaders"

1. **Vision** — "Visionary leaders see before others, and they see more than others."
2. **Communication** — "You have to increase understanding to increase caring."
3. **People skills** — "Great leaders have a heart for people."
4. **Character** — "As retired U.S. Army General H.

Norman Schwarzkopf once said, 'Leadership is a potent combination of strategy and character. But if you must be without one, be without strategy.'

5. Competence — "Are great leaders born that way, or did they develop those skills? The answer is 'both.' ... And remember, you can't become a life-long teacher until you become a lifelong learner."

6. Boldness — "Great leaders have boldness, not ballness. They gather information, think things through from every angle, and when it's time to make decisions, they do so and then they move on."

7. Service — "Leadership is a form of service, which is a lost art to far too many today."

Williams' traits of great teams

Great leaders — "Great leaders view people as the bottom line, not as a tool to get to the bottom line."

Great talent — "You need to find people who are coachable and will help your team chemistry."

Great drive — "Welcome competition: It drags out of us that which we wouldn't do otherwise, but should be doing."

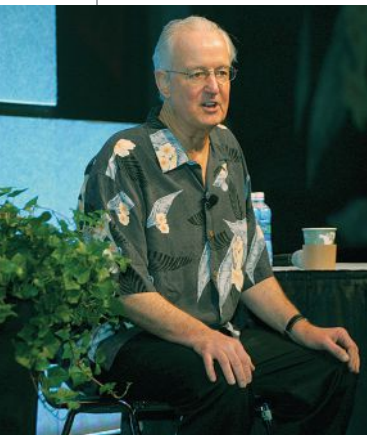
Great passion — "This passion is contagious and runs deep and far — it's never forgotten."

Great sportsmanship — "As Tommy Lasorda, 20-year manager of the Los Angeles Dodgers, has said, 'Remember, play for the name on the front of your jersey, not for the name on the back.'"

Great support — "As Chick-fil-A founder S. Truett Cathy once told me, 'You know how many people out there need encouragement? Everybody who's breathing — that's who.'"

Great respect — "When you treat everyone with respect, it leads to trust, which leads to loyalty, which leads to love, which leads to lifelong friendship."

Great character — "Honesty. Integrity. Responsibility: No finger pointing or selective amnesia. Hard working: all day, every day. Perseverance. Humble spirit. And, last but not least, courage: As John Wayne put so well, 'Courage is being scared to death, but saddling up anyway.'"



Pat Williams



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SUMMER OF THE WEED

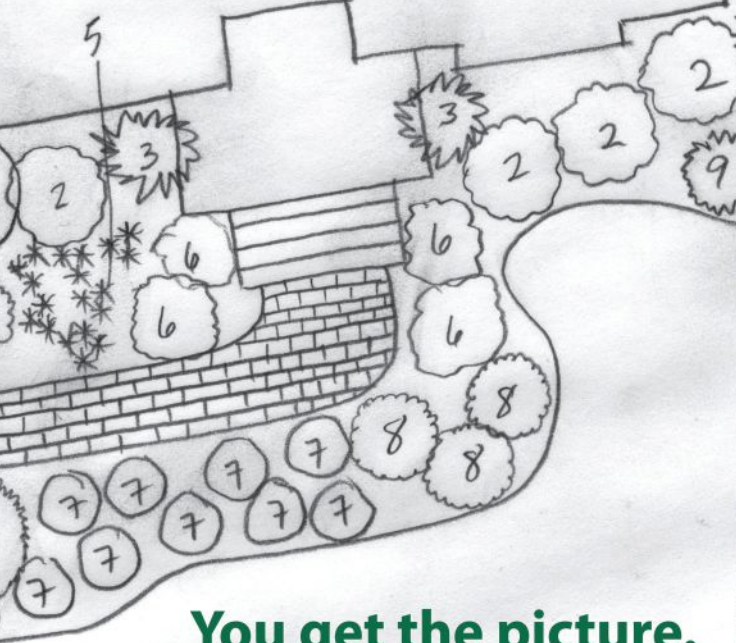
Bad weather can be good for business. Lawn care is one of the few bright spots in a down economy. **BY DAN JACOBS** EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

It's been a rough season. In many parts of the country, spring began with a huge amount of wet weather. That was followed by a very hot, dry summer — ideal conditions for the weeds that lawn care companies battle to make a living. And it seems, in a down economy and a depressed Green Industry, lawn care is the one bit of sunshine peaking through the rainclouds.

Weather

An executive at a mower manufacturer company once commented he didn't care what condition the economy was in. As long as it was raining, the grass would grow and people always need their grass cut. Apparently the early wet weather, followed by high temps and a lack of rain, led to increased business for lawn care professionals as well. "Crabgrass is becoming more and more of an issue because we're having soil cracking," says Tom Knopsnyder, vice president of operations for southeastern PAs Green Lawn Fertilizing. "Because of that, crabgrass is becoming more and more of a problem along with nutsedge. Before you would never really notice it in the month of July. We've been spraying it pretty much since the fourth."

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LAWN CARE'S SHINING STARS

Lawn Dawg (No. 12) and Green Lawn Fertilizing (No. 16) are among the companies with the highest lawn care revenue in the Green Industry according to data provided for the LM150.

1	TruGreen Lawncare and LandCare	\$1,335,175,000
2	Scotts Lawn Service	\$261,000,000
3	Weed Man	\$105,000,000
4	Lawn Doctor	\$78,850,000
5	NaturaLawn of America	\$37,372,500
6	Spring-Green Lawn Care Corp.	\$29,767,050
7	USM	\$13,330,590
8	Naturescape	\$12,482,090
9	Ryan Lawn & Tree	\$10,417,200
10	SavATree	\$9,366,600
11	Senske Lawn & Tree Care	\$7,600,000
12	Lawn Dawg	\$6,822,841
13	ProGrass	\$6,500,000
14	U.S. Lawns	\$6,120,000
15	DLC Resources Inc.	\$5,500,273
16	Green Lawn Fertilizing Inc.	\$5,000,273
17	Underwood Bros Inc. dba AAA Landscape	\$4,500,000
18	Moyer Indoor/Outdoor	\$4,483,415
19	Christy Webber Landscapes	\$4,093,562
20	Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care	\$3,740,974
21	Mainscape	\$2,793,000
22	Clintar Landscape Management	\$2,310,000
23	Lipinski Outdoor Services	\$2,127,811
24	Acres Group	\$2,057,594
25	Moore Landscapes Inc.	\$2,000,000



Weather conditions have been perfect for goosegrass and crabgrass, requiring many lawn care companies to do spot treatments.

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And it's not just southeast Pennsylvania that's having problems.

"It's got hot in many parts of the country," says Kyle Miller, senior technical specialist for BASF. "All of our sales reps are talking about how much weed control is being done now."

Even companies that were able to put down treatments in the spring have had issues.

"Most of the herbicides that we traditionally used in landscapes are gone," says Jason Fausey, field development manager, Valent Professional Products. "They broke down faster; they got moved through the soil profile and now we're getting a lot of weeds."

The early wet weather might have led to lush lawns, but that can only take a homeowner so far.

"Even though your lawn was thick this spring, which we all would equate with an ability to compete with weeds during the summer, you've got very little herbicide left," Miller says. "It's not able to compete with these weeds, now that the hot weather has hit. Those summer weeds are more competitive than the turf."

Of course, weather isn't the only factor. Products and practice play a role in weed

continued on page 16



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COVER STORY

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control, too.

“There are some subtle differences in some of the preemergent products,” Fausey says. “And a split application over a single application — it’s a philosophy. Sometimes it works for people and sometimes they just don’t take the time to go back to the same landscape to make two applications. It’s a better way to get more out of the same amount of product.”

With strong outbreaks of crabgrass and sedges there are a lot of spot treatments going on.

“In a normal year they might have to go to a client’s property and spot treat here and there or some years not too much at all,” Miller says. “This year they’re finding they’re having to go after it full tilt because they’ve got so many weeds pushing through.”



Crabgrass is one of the tougher challenges this year (left). Overly edged curbs and sidewalks help weeds invade more easily.

Challenges

Weather is not the only concern for contractors.

“There are growing restrictions and regulations in different counties and states (primarily along the East Coast),” says Patrick Bell, product manager, US Turf and Ornamental with Dow AgroSciences. “Lawn care professionals are facing a lot more regulations.”

Increased regulation might be the

natural order for politicians, but it creates huge problems for contractors when those laws are created with few facts.

“Very little of the legislation that is introduced is based on hard science at all,” says Jim Campanella, president of Lawn Dawg, Nashua, NH. “It’s emotion; it’s symbolism over substance. It’s an emotional subject for some people, but you can’t legislate on emotion.”

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PHOTOS COURTESY: BASF (ABOVE LEFT); VALENT PROFESSIONAL PRODUCTS

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That's very dangerous."

Campanella, a former president of the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) has spent a great deal of time at committee meetings and hearings, meeting with representatives and battling that very issue.

"What was frightening for me when I got up there and started dealing with this was that I was the only person from the lawn care industry," he says. Many peers attended the committee hearings in January, but the real work, Campanella says, takes place in spring and summer when most of the owners are out working.

"We don't have the ability to defend ourselves," he says. "Fortunately I was in a position where I could, and did. RISE (Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment) was helpful as were some local pest control companies, and we were able to ward off that legislation."

Trends

Weather, not in the seasonal sense, but from a climate change point of view, seems to be slowly influencing the industry as well.

Part of the challenge has been the change in weather during the past decade. Whether it's global warming or simply a temporary anomaly is a topic others can debate.

Knopsnyder knows there's been a change. For the past 10 years the temperature has reached the high 80s in April.

"It didn't used to be like that," Knopsnyder says. "Because of that we've had to change our process to make sure we're putting down the right products along with seeding the lawns with the best heat stress (tolerant) turfgrass."

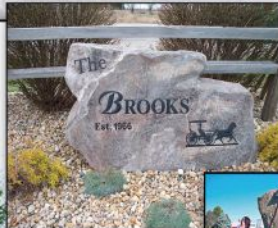
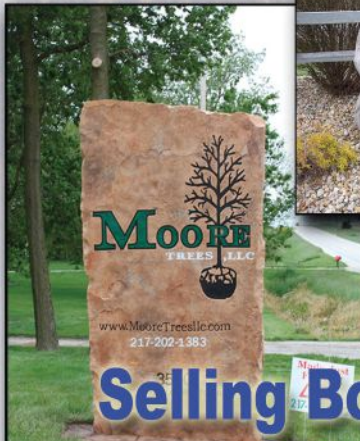
Warm season grasses are more drought tolerant and require less water than cool season alternatives.

Even guys with direct access to lawn

Tom Hill's fescue lawn simply couldn't hold up to the dry, hot weather.



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That's a sentiment shared by many. "Lawn care and landscape is what we consider the bright spot," says Bryan Gooch, marketing manager for Agrium Advanced Technologies. "The golf economy is still (challenged). The horticulture, nurseries and green houses, they're not where they should be because commercial and residential real

estate development is not back where it needs to be.

"We feel like we're growing in lawn-care," Gooch says.

It's one area the company will continue to invest in, he says.

"If consumer spending is down, people aren't traveling as much," Gooch says. "There's a belief that people



care products can have problems.

Tom Hill, communications manager — Specialty Products for BASF, isn't immune from the challenges of cool season turf in a market seemingly better suited for warm season grass.

"I went from fescue to zoysia in the last 12 months for that very reason," Hill says. "Because it was so hot the fescue was burning up. No matter how much water I was able to put on — even though I had irrigation — I had spots that were burning up. I decided to save money and put in turf that was going to be easier to manage during these hot periods of time in the transition zone."

The bright spot

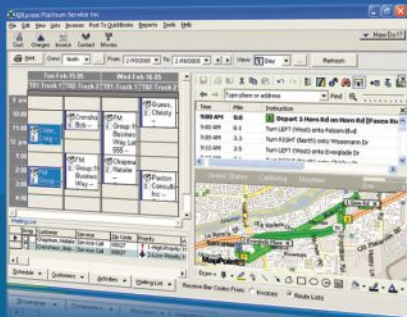
So, what does this all mean for lawn care professionals? For one they've been busy this summer and many are cashing in.

"What I have seen is an increase in activity — sales activity," Campanella says. "People are buying lawn care this year. I'm seeing that not only in my own organization, but among my peers I'm hearing the same thing. Everybody seems to be up a little bit after having some flat years."



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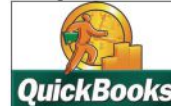
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IS RESISTANCE AN ISSUE?

While there are numerous reports of weed resistance cropping up in agriculture and some in the golf market, it looks like the turf and ornamental (T&O) segment is safe...for now.

"There shouldn't be any glyphosate resistance to speak of in the T&O business," says Russ Mitchell, director of marketing and southern regional sales manager for Quali-Pro. "It's not like ag. The problem with ag is everything is about the absolute cheapest everything. And they tend to use really low rates of glyphosate. They're out there spraying at this

glyphosate resistance stuff at a pint to a quart of glyphosate per acre."

That doesn't mean there's not some concern.

"We do have weed resistance, for sure, but it's more with pre-emergence and post-emergence where people have used the same family of chemistry over and over and over," Mitchell says. "Just like fungicides, if you don't rotate, you're guaranteed to have resistance."

There are many products that are good at killing poa and rye grass out of bermuda, Mitchell says. "The problem is, if you use them enough years you get to all

of a sudden you can't kill the poa. You've got to rotate to other chemistries.

"People need to look at herbicides like they do fungicides," he continues. "They know they have to rotate classes and families of chemistry. People have not paid that much attention because it's not that big a deal in herbicides."

Bobby Walls, Manager of Product Development for Professional Solutions Group on the T&O side for FMC doesn't believe resistance is a concern either.

"You hear people every now and then say, 'I've used product X and I'm now not getting control of a certain weed.'" Walls says. "I'm not sure they're always resistant issues. There could be

some other things there."

But like Mitchell, Walls encourages lawn care professionals to rotate their products.

"They need to be aware of their use of herbicides," he says. "Anytime we continually use one mode of action on the same weed, down the road potentially that's how resistance can be developed. First we identify the weed properly so we know what we're targeting to control. Then we use the proper herbicide that will control that weed and then we use it according to the label rate to make sure we get the control. We don't under dose it; we don't overdose it. That will help us avoid having problems in the future."

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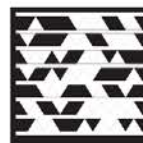


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want their homes at least to be nice. If people are spending more time at home, they're spending more time in their yards. That translates over to the professional market."

Campanella has seen the same thing at Lawn Dawg.

"It's still doom and gloom on all the radio and TV (programs)," Campanella says. "It seems people are starting to free up the cash a little bit for services like ours that aren't really a necessity.

"Talking to customers, the response I get is, 'the lawn's going to grow, and if it's not fed, it's going to die. If I do it myself, it will cost about the same as having you do it. If I'm going to put in a patio, a deck, a new brick walkway, a new landscape bed, now you're into thousands of dollars. That's what we'll cut back on, but having the lawn fertilized. It just has to be done. Somebody has to do it.'"

And that seems to be showing up in his numbers. From 2009 to 2010 Lawn Dawg's revenue was up about 12%; this year Campanella expects a 20% bump.

"That was our plan of attack to grow the business. The original plan was (to grow) 17-18%," Campanella says. "It's a little bit better than what we expected, but we were gunning for some growth this year anyway. It was really based on last year's positive trend. The previous year we were flat."

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— JIM CAMPANELLA, PRESIDENT



Flat might be the new reality for some markets, but lawn care isn't one of them.

"The bright spot that we're hearing, the optimism is very high right now," Bell says. "The assumption is the worst is behind us in our market. The expectation is that things will get better." **LM**

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THE BENCHMARK

KEVIN KEHOE

The author, owner-manager of 3PG Consulting, is a 25-year industry veteran. Reach him at kkehoe@questex.com.

The new normal

Have you asked yourself, “Why am I attending another seminar titled ‘Adapting to the New Normal?’” The very idea implies we accept a future of lower expectations.

I will never be involved in another, without first identifying for the audience the reasons for the “new normal.” Our failure to discuss real causes suggests a bovine acceptance of things — that this is the way things must be for small businesses, and we can do little but cope with it. In fact, we should be talking about more than simply adapting — we should be discussing how to change the circumstances that have created and continue to perpetuate our sad economic situation.

I recently attended a conference where several clearheaded professionals (not the-world-is-ending types) made the case that we are in for an extended run of high unemployment and lower consumer expectations and spending. In other words, things are not fundamentally or materially improving, despite what the stock market is doing. The case is compelling — and if we are paying attention to our own income statements, it is all too obvious. Every industry benchmark, which I have been keeping for the past 20 years, clearly bears this out.

As Table 1 shows, the real problem with lower prices and higher costs is the impact on return on assets. A three-person crew simply earns less revenue and profit than it did three years ago but still needs the same equipment, which is now more expensive and harder to finance. It is becoming increasingly clear that the “new normal” is slow death for many undercapitalized companies.

The causes themselves are also clear: Burdensome government intervention in the economy in the form of shifting tax policy, regulatory statutes and deficit spending is perpetuating an environment where small businesses continue to underperform in terms of growth, profit and return on investment. Look no further than the impact H-2B policy and the healthcare reform issue have on the industry. Regardless of your political persuasion, these are the facts. We cannot ignore them and put our heads in the sand.

According to the clearheaded investors at the conference, the days of a robust U.S. economy producing a rising tide that floats all boats are over. The game we played for the last several decades has been fundamentally turned on its head, given the current and ongoing political circumstances. Without changing these circumstances, we should expect this environment will produce more losers than winners, especially in the small business arena.

Certainly, we must address the short term and take steps to win, but we do have choices in the longer term. We can accept a long-term economy where it’s every man for himself, or we in this very vital segment of the economy (Sub Chapter S small business) can find our voice and actively work — as a coherent group — to change the circumstances instead of merely adapting to them. We can continue to treat the symptoms of low pricing, wage cuts, aging equipment, scarce capital and labor shortages, or we can choose to address the causes.

The stakes are high, and I would be remiss were I to merely address solutions to symptoms without addressing the causes. And so would we all.

TABLE 1: RETURN ON ASSET COMPARISON

Item / Name	Calculation	2005	2011
A / Revenue		\$1,000,000	\$1,000,000
B / Profit		\$120,000	\$70,000
C / Profit percentage	B/A	12%	7%
D / Balance sheet assets		\$250,000	\$325,000
E / Asset turns	A/D	4.00	3.08
F / Return on assets	B/D	48%	22%

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Jeff Hostetler
NFL Quarterback mows his
40-acre estate with a Ventrac.

NFL Champion Discovers Slope Mower



NFL Quarterback, Jeff Hostetler, knows what it takes to be a winner. Hostetler played fifteen years in the league, winning Super Bowl XXV with the Giants. “Being in the NFL, you’re at the top of the line in that profession

and to get there you had to do a lot of work,” says Hostetler. “You have to be **tough, durable** and all of those things I can relate to Ventrac. It is well made, it is **sturdy** and it **performs**. I’m **totally impressed with Ventrac.**”

Hostetler lives outside Morgantown, WV on a 40-acre horse farm. “If you’ve been to West Virginia you realize there is no flat land. So we have a lot of hillsides and challenging areas to cut and mow. I was looking for something that was going to be more **manageable on hillsides** and **safer** than the current tractor that I was using.” That is when Hostetler discovered Ventrac. “You’re sitting low and it has such a great base that there are areas you get in and you hardly even know that you are on a hillside.”



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Patrick Nibler along with partner Paul Bizon started out in 1978 pursuing lawn care customers in the Portland market right before ChemLawn came to the area. Over the years, the pair has added services to accommodate the customer base. Tree and shrub care began in the early '80s; residential maintenance and landscape construction/erosion control in the early '90s and commercial maintenance in the late '90s. *LM* talked with Nibler to see how the company has evolved and where it's going.

How has the business changed in the past few years?

In 2007, we added an interior maintenance unit in Portland. The Portland area was our initial starting point for new services, then we exported them to our branches in Seattle, Eugene and Central California.

The goal and the challenge is to be a resource for almost any landscape service that a residential or commercial customer — some are both — may need.

Where does lawn care fit into your company's services these days?

Lawn care is still a big part of what we do, but as a percentage of our business, it has been eclipsed by the growth of some of our other services — particularly, residential and commercial maintenance.

You've devoted a lot of your personal time to industry associations, especially the former Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA, now part of the Professional Landcare

Network, or PLANET), where you were a longtime board member. What did you learn from the experience?

Any time that you get a chance to meet other people in related businesses, you have a real opportunity to learn from their experiences. Everyone in this industry seems to be willing to share information about their own operations and programs, and that can be a big help. An added bonus is the friends that you make along the way.

Prograss stresses its local ownership, its Pacific Northwest roots, and its commitment to "common sense" sustainability. How does all of that fit together?

Our approach has always been to choose materials and methods that provide consistent results for our customers, and utilize low-impact materials. We look for options in application that permit spot spraying vs. broadcast application, or injection vs. spraying the entire canopy.

Integrated pest management (IPM) is the main focus of our ongoing in-house training. We favor biological

and botanical categorized materials for our tree and shrub program, and organic fertilizers blended with conventional fertilizers can benefit the soils in our lawn care programs.

When we looked at Prograss.com, we were amazed by the depth of the company's community service. How does the company find the time and the money to contribute so much?

Community service efforts are a small part of our marketing program, but whether it is a donation to a charity auction or a lawn makeover for an Iraq veteran, we feel that these help with our brand in the local area.

Can you share any industry trends you see developing in the Pacific Northwest?

One positive trend that I see in this economy is an opportunity to talk to more people about careers in landscape services. More talent is out there that will consider moving to another company, or young workers are looking at the industry as an option for employment.

AT A GLANCE

COMPANY: Prograss Landscape Care & Design

WEBSITE: Prograss.com

FOUNDED: 1978

HEADQUARTERS: Wilsonville, OR

TITLE: Patrick Nibler, Operations Manager

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY: 33

SERVICE AREA: Portland, OR, and Vancouver, WA, metro areas, and communities along the I-5 corridor from Seattle to Northern California

INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT: Longtime member of PLCAA and PLANET, served on PLCAA Board of Directors, Northwest Turfgrass Association Board of Directors

NUMBER OF LOCATIONS: 6

EMPLOYEES: 170 in season

SERVICES: Residential and commercial lawn and landscape maintenance; landscape installation; pruning and plant replacement; irrigation services; home pest control; interior/urban landscaping; athletic field maintenance; erosion control; and environmental services

PERSONAL HIGHLIGHTS/HOBBIES: Golf

FAMILY: Wife, Cheryl, of 33 years, sons Blake, 27, and Andrew, 23



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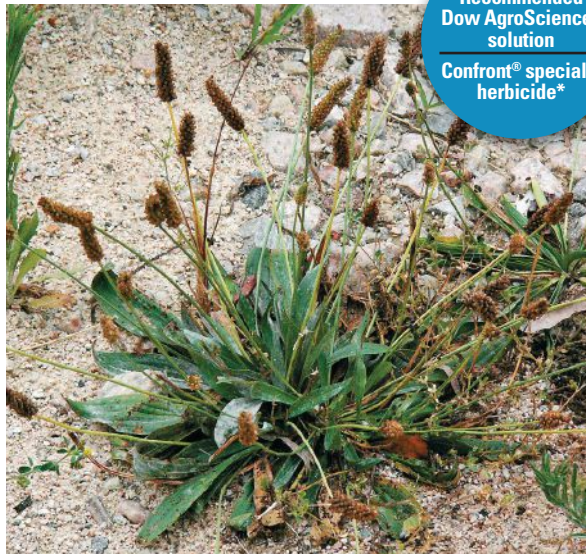
Geranium carolinianum

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This winter annual or biennial is often called crane's bill because of the shape of the fruit.
- ▶ Leaves are deeply dissected and divided into five to nine toothed segments.
- ▶ As it matures, the basal rosette experiences stem elongation and branching.
- ▶ The densely hairy stems are erect, usually pink to red in color.
- ▶ Whitish-pink to purple flowers help differentiate this weed from smaller geranium species.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Fall applications are recommended. Hand-pull any existing geraniums.
- ▶ Apply a pre-emergent broadleaf herbicide labeled for use on your ornamental beds. Products containing isoxaben are effective, and are labeled for ornamental plant tolerance on more than 630 ornamental species.



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BUCKHORN PLANTAIN

Plantago lanceolata

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This perennial turf-grass weed is commonly found in maintained turf, agricultural land and other disturbed sites.
- ▶ Leaves are football-shaped and spiral around a short stem, clustering around the base of the plant.
- ▶ It has narrower leaves and shorter flower stalks than broadleaf plantain (*Plantago major*).
- ▶ Flower heads consist of leafless, slender spikes of inconspicuous flowers clustered densely along

the upright flowering head. Open flowers have protruding white stamens.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ In spring or fall, apply a post-emergent broadleaf herbicide with good translocation properties to thoroughly control the root system of this plant. Two- and three-way auxinic herbicide products provide thorough control.
- ▶ Properly fertilize, mow and water to maintain lush turf growth and minimize the potential for buckhorn plantain to establish itself.

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GUIDE

TAKE *note*

One expert advises how to avoid being found liable in slip-and-fall lawsuits.

BY BETH GERACI

Limit your exposure to liability by putting everything in writing.

JOHAN A. ALLIN, CSP, flipped through his slides at the 14th Annual Snow & Ice Symposium and looked intently at his audience of national snow and ice contractors.

"It's all about the money," he emphasized.

The expert witness and professional consultant in snow and ice litigation was talking about the motivation behind slip-and-fall lawsuits — and how contractors can avoid them.

A snow and ice lawsuit is prompted as much by greed as by sidewalk imperfections, on-site errors and bad judgment, Allin says. He added that if a lawsuit is filed against them, contractors are doomed to lose if they haven't systematically and painstakingly documented their work.

In fact, documenting adequately is the single most important step a snow and ice contractor can take to protect him or herself from liability, Allin says, because it helps in "proving you did what you were contracted to do."

"Keeping records that are customary and consistent is key," he says. "Documenting is not a one-time event. It's an every-time event."

What's more, Allin advises keeping records on file for at least seven years. Document your training programs, he says. Take photographs. And most importantly, have a formal plan and execute it.

The list of what contractors should document is exhaustive: work per-

continued on page 31



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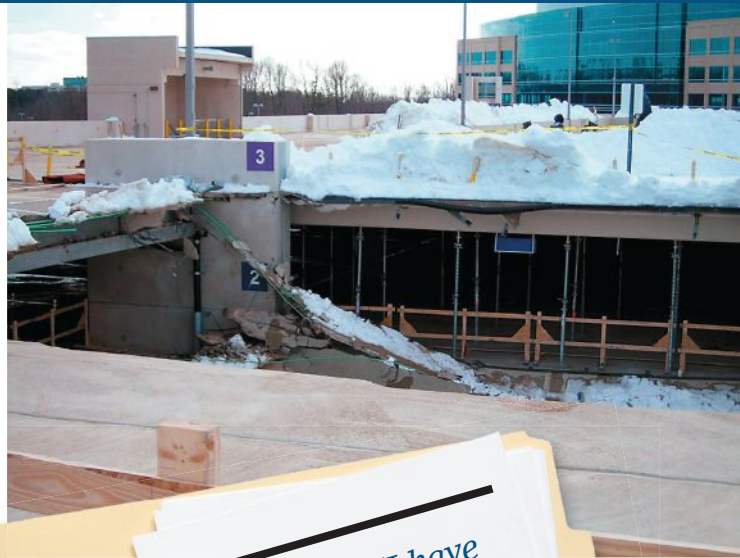
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Simply Genius





continued from page 29

formed; length of time the project took to complete; materials used; obstacles; accomplishments; all correspondence; and everything in between.

Recordkeeping doesn't start and end with administrative assistants, Allin cautions. Everyone is responsible for documenting information, he says, "from the person answering the phone and keeping track of incoming calls, to the plowers and salters and sidewalk crews at the site."

But as vulnerable as lax documentation makes contractors to a payout, no mistake is more egregious than failing to follow the language in a contract, Allin says. He reminded the audience they have the ability to change a contract's language, and that they absolutely should if they're uncomfortable with the contract.

"Do the job you were hired to do," he said, nothing more, nothing less.

"Have a process, document it and do it," Allin continued. The problem is, few snow contractors actually have formal procedures in place. And contractors who don't have them better implement them, he says.

"By far and away, most snow contractors have an 'out of sight, out of mind' mentality about 'process,'" he says. "If they think 'I have not been sued ever, so it will not ever happen,' this is foolish, shortsighted and an avoidance of responsibility."

In all his years consulting as an expert witness in snow-and-ice lawsuits, Allin says he has observed one universal flaw in the way snow and ice companies operate: Attention to

A vehicle toppled into a parking garage that collapsed from a bad plow job.

If they think 'I have not been sued ever, so it will not ever happen,' this is foolish, shortsighted and an avoidance of responsibility."

— JOHN ALLIN

detail is nearly always lacking.

Such carelessness has the same effect as contaminants rising up the food chain; problems intensify the farther contractors advance in the project.

Moreover, "a lack of attention to detail and proper documentation eventually retards progress and growth to a point where the company begins to fold under its own unorganized weight," Allin says.

At the seminar, Allin displayed photos of snow and ice work gone awry. One was a shot of piles of snow plowed up against a man's front door and across the front walk. The man had no way to leave his house, and when he tried, Allin said, the homeowner slipped and fell.

The other photo featured a collapsed parking garage. A snow plower pushed so much snow up against the

parking garage, a wall collapsed, Allin said, adding a vehicle later drove right into the abyss.

The audience laughed at the images' absurdity. But bad plow jobs are no laughing matter, Allin says. So, when snow and ice contractors find themselves embroiled in litigation, they should take control and "participate in the lawsuit," Allin says. Contractors can't afford to sit idly by and hope their lawyers take care of everything, he says.

"Once you are notified of the suit filing, sending it to the insurance agent and then forgetting about it is tantamount to misconduct," Allin asserts. "You need to supply the lawyer with documentation that can aid in their defense of your position. You need to ask to participate, and then actually do so. The insurance carrier's defense is only as good as your records." LMI

Beet it

As snow pros seek greener deicing methods, the sugar beet is stepping up. **BY BETH GERACI**



WHILE ROCK SALT IS earning a dubious reputation as a killer of plants, grass and infrastructure along highways, the friendly sugar beet is gaining cred as its viable, more environmentally sound alternative.

Not only are sugar beet-derived deicers more ecological; they also are effective thawing agents, say winter product manufacturers, government officials and distributors.

Cheap and effective, rock salt (sodium chloride) traditionally has been the thawing agent of choice on U.S. bridges and roads. But economical or not, there's a price to pay for using it in concentrated amounts, snow and ice professionals like Jay Walerstein say.

Walerstein is vice president of sales and marketing for Road Solutions, a manufacturer, blender and distributor of green deicing products such as Univar's liquid Ice Bite — which is among the most widely used sugar beet-based deicers on the market.

"When a salt spreader releases rock salt, it bounces all over," Walerstein says. "And then cars disperse it. And then the salt ends up in the medium, in the ditches, in the grass on the side, where it does absolutely nothing but kill the grass and shrubs with concentrated levels of rock salt and deteriorate the concrete."

Likewise, because of rock salt on its roads, "Minnesota is having its streams and lakes filled with so much saline that it's killing the fish," says Chris Wehri,

chemical sales manager for Fargo, ND-based Prairie Supply, a Midwest distributor of Univar's Ice Bite.

Sugar beet-based deicers aren't salt free. Rather, they're blended with salt products to enhance their effectiveness. That's because sugar beets alone are ineffective melting agents, Walerstein says.

Sugar beet-based deicers can be a combination of one of many blends: calcium chloride and beet juice; magnesium chloride and beet juice; potassium acetate and beet juice; or rock salt brine and beet juice. Of those, the rock salt brine and beet juice blend is the most cost effective, Wehri and Walerstein assert.

Rock salt stops working at about 15 degrees Fahrenheit, meaning it won't melt ice at temperatures below that, they say. Sugar beet derivatives, however, work even in sub-zero temperatures, lowering water's freezing point, Wehri says.

Galen Kauzlarich, Geomelt 55 sales manager for Iowa's Smith Fertilizer and Grain, says beet-based deicing products enhance the effectiveness of chlorides, making the roads less slick, for longer periods of time, with less corrosive runoff.

Geomelt 55 is a liquid sugar beet-based deicer consisting of 70 percent salt brine and 30 percent sugar beet byproduct. In its first year of business — 10 years ago — Geomelt sold 20,000 gallons of Geomelt 55, Kauzlarich says; today he sells exponentially more than that annually in his region alone.

More and more Midwestern and Eastern states are testing sugar beet-derived deicers on their roads, including Kansas, the Dakotas, Ohio, Illinois and a growing list of others. Last winter, the New York State Thruway Authority tested a beet-brine solution on Albany and Syracuse highways with positive results, says Betsy Feldstein, the Authority's public information officer.

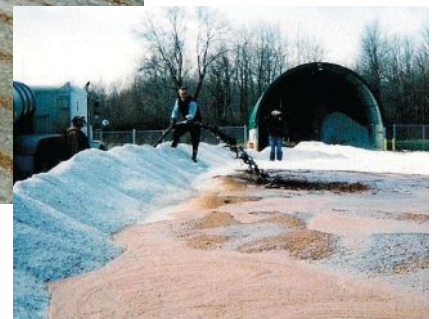
Slick pavement wasn't reported at any temperature, she says, and "the beet-brine mixture is organic and environmentally friendly." The beet solution also reduced refreezing on Albany highway ramps, Feldstein says, and "will not stain cars or roads, because so little of it is used and what is used is absorbed by salt and snow."

Walerstein's worked in the business for 11 years. "Let me tell you," he quips, "you can't beat the beet." **LM**



◀ A spray truck disperses a sugar beet-based deicer on the highway.

▼ Road Solutions employees treat 400 tons of rock salt with Ice Bite.



PHOTOS COURTESY: JAY WALERSTEIN (FAR LEFT); JAY WALERSTEIN (LEFT); STOCK/INTERNATIONAL INC.



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PTO-driven DriftBuster snowthrowers for **Grasshopper's** full line of True ZeroTurn mowers deliver "no-clog" performance, even in deep or heavy, wet snows. A discharge spout controlled from the operator's seat rotates a full 180° to deliver snow up to 30 ft. away. Available in 48- and 60-in. models, the units feature heavy-gauge welded steel construction, a high-speed 12-in.-diameter auger and a heavy-duty replaceable scraper blade. An optional steering lever-mounted joystick control allows easy lifting of the auger and rotation of the chute from the comfort of the winter enclosure. ThrowMoreSnow.com



Busy bristles

Pro-Tech introduces five new Sno Broom attachments for skid steers and compact tractors. Sno Brooms minimize the potential for damaging surfaces and easily remove snow against curbs and walls. Skid steer models are available with 60-, 72- and 84-in. broom widths. They include a universal coupler for attaching to equipment with various hydraulic flow ratings and can be hydraulically angled 30° left or right. The PTO-driven tractor model is designed for machines with at least 30 hp. ProTechCorp.com



Quiet power

Ariens' AMP 24 Sno-Thro is an all-electric two-stage snow thrower with a 24-in. clearing width. The machine runs between 45 and 60 minutes on a single charge, depending on snow conditions, and provides a quieter alternative to traditional gas-powered snow throwers. The AMP 24 Sno-Thro is powered by a 4-hp brushless DC electric motor and energized by two 48-volt AGM Valve Regulated battery packs. Advantages include an easy start, reduced service requirements because there is no gasoline engine — and no associated gasoline costs or special storage requirements during summer months. Ariens.com



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Compact maneuvering

Compatible with small skid steers, compact tractors and small wheel loaders, the new Compact-Duty plows from **Arctic Snow and Ice Control Products** are designed for clearing small parking lots, sidewalks and larger driveways. The CD plows reduce fuel and salt usage by increasing pushing efficiency and eliminating follow-up



plowing. Unlike traditional one-piece moldboard plows, the Sectional Sno-Plows feature a sectional moldboard design. Each 24-in.-wide section is also equipped with a spring-loaded trip edge and polyurethane cutting edge for precision plowing. The plows are outfitted with Sectional Sno-Plow's patented Slip-Hitch system, providing faster, easier and more efficient operation. The system allows the plow to adjust and readjust to the pavement grade, resulting in fewer missed areas and less follow-up plowing. *Sectional-Plow.com*



ATV attachments

The **Meyer Path Pro** is designed for clearing snow from sidewalks or other tight areas not suitable for a plow truck. Paired with the Meyer Base Line-125 spreader, an ATV turns into the perfect snow and ice management vehicle. Path Pro, a commercial-grade, full-trip plow available in 50- or 60-in. widths, features highway-inspired flared wings that scoop and funnel snow faster and farther. The BL-125 tailgate spreader's low profile allows salt, calcium chloride, fertilizer and seed to disperse closer to the ground, providing better control of material output. At the heart of the BL-125 is an elevated heavy-duty electric motor, built to withstand the harshest winter conditions. *MeyerProducts.com*

Flare flair

The new VF series trip-edge V-plows from **Hiniker** feature deep-curl flared wings, providing the capacity to cast deep snow far and high. Double-acting hydraulic cylinders provide positive hydraulic control of moldboard positioning, whether plowing forward or back-dragging. Super-bright quad halogen headlights have up to twice the power of typical sealed beam lamps. Independent high-clearance trip-edge design provides smooth operation and enhanced protection. *Hiniker.com*

plowing. Unlike traditional one-piece moldboard plows, the Sectional Sno-Plows feature a sectional moldboard design. Each 24-in.-wide section is also equipped with a spring-loaded trip edge and polyurethane cutting edge for precision plowing. The plows are outfitted with Sectional Sno-Plow's patented Slip-Hitch system, providing faster, easier and more efficient operation. The



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Get the drift

The FFC Snow Blower by **Paladin Construction Group** turns a skid steer into a mini snow-plowing machine for small to medium snow removal jobs. This two-stage hydraulic blower is available in both standard and high-flow models that range between 4 and 8 ft. wide, with shroud openings of 25 or 36 in. The 18-in. auger cuts as deep as 36 in. into snow and drifts, and then throws it up to 45 ft. away from your clearing surface. Choose from an electronic or electro/hydraulic powered, poly-lined chute and deflector that reduces clogging and makes direction adjustments quickly. High-flow models never require a case drain. To ensure a cleaner and safer surface, FFC Snow Blowers have replaceable, wear-resistant hardened

edges that can be changed when they become dull. *PaladinConstructionGroup.com*



Clean machine

The **Gravely** Power Brush 28 features a 28-in.-wide head for fast clearing work, and the height adjustment system accommodates various surfaces and optimizes brush wear. The brush head also rotates 40°, with an operator-controlled pivot lock. Powered by a 169cc all-season EX 17 Subaru engine, the unit features an electric start and an automatic traction control system. It can be used year-round for snow removal, lawn de-thatching and clearing sand, dirt, grass clippings or other debris. *Ariens.com*



To the max

Offering a 2-cu.-yd. hopper capacity, the V-Maxx 8550 High Output spreader from **SnowEx** features a new transmission with a gear ratio of 40:1. This allows the unit to spread 295 to 680 lbs. of material per minute (3.6 to 8.3 cu. ft. per minute), which triples the rate of the comparable V-Maxx 8500 model. Designed to spread sand, the V-Maxx 8550 comes standard with a patented multi-angle hopper, an inverted-“V” baffle and an attached vibrator. For reduced maintenance, the spreader’s hopper is made from corrosion-resistant polyethylene. Plus, there are no engines, pulleys, sprockets, belts or chains to maintain. The unit is completely electric-powered with a high-torque, 0.5-hp motor, and all electrical components are fully sealed for weather protection. *TrynexFactory.com*

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Spread success

The new SS575 salt spreader, for the **Ventrac** 4000 series, is for winter services and spreading materials such as bagged rock salt and calcium flake. With the optional gate installed, the SS575 can also spread bagged ice melters and calcium pellets. An optional vibrator kit also allows for bulk salt to be spread. The SS575 spreader features a 5.75 cu. ft. hopper capable of carrying 460 lbs. A see-through weather cover for the hopper comes standard. An electronic control box also comes standard, and features an electronic speed control and on/off switch. An optional drop curtain is available for spreading material in tight quarters such as sidewalks, parking garages and more. *Ventrac.com*



End of Season Review - 2011

Customer

Lot Size

Challenges

Grocery Store



2.5 acre

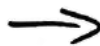


Many obstacles
Sidewalks

Hospital



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Corporate Office Park



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Sidewalks
Little room for
snow piling

Possibilities



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MAINTENANCE: HARDSCAPE ESSENTIALS

Belgard Hardscapes by Oldcastle



This spring, Belgard Hardscapes by Oldcastle participated in Project NOLA, a community outreach project designed to help rebuild New Orleans' homes damaged by Hurricane Katrina. It sponsored two of the five homes to be renovated, donating products (including its Eco Dublin permeable pavers, pictured) and sent a team of

employees to help with installation. The permeable pathway was chosen for one of the homes, which belongs to a legally blind resident, because it will not allow water to puddle on the surface and instead will provide a sturdy path for the resident to easily follow. Learn more about the project on the Belgard Hardscapes blog at BelgardHardscapes.wordpress.com. OldcastleAPG.com

Pine Hall Brick

The Plaza at Kenan Hall/Flagler College in St. Augustine, FL, recently won a Brick Industry Association Silver Award for paving and landscape architecture. The 5,300-sq.-ft. plaza used Pine Hall Brick StormPave permeable pavers in accent gray and autumn. The pavers effectively picked up the colors of the nearby building, in line with local historic-district guidelines. It also provided an effective way to drain away stormwater. PineHallBrick.com



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Techniseal

Newly introduced NuLook is a tinted sealant made from acrylic, urethane and nanocrystal pigments. This semi-transparent coating is designed to change the color of pavers and poured concrete — ideal for rejuvenating older pavers that have suffered the effects of time and neglect. Available in four colors, NuLook is part of the ProSeries line of products. Techniseal.com



Concrete Stone and Tile Corp.

Munich Green Permeable pavers provide an aesthetically pleasing MONO-CAST paver without sacrificing properties to promote quality stormwater runoff. The pavers' design encourages admission of water into the ground and the natural re-charge of the aquifer. Additionally, CST's permeable pavers protect the environment from the

malignant pollutants emitted by runoff. Color options for the 6x9-in. Munich Green pavers include hickory blend, antique gray and butternut. CSTPavers.com/permeable.php

Fiberon

The strong, rigid core of new Pro-Tect decking is encased on three sides in a patent-pending, non-organic surface material that is resistant to staining, fading, scratches and mold. This protective surface preserves the enduring beauty of two rich colors, canyon brown and harbor gray (pictured), and natural-looking graining that offers the appearance of real wood to complement any architectural style. Deck boards are available as grooved (GV) in .935 in. x 5.4 in. x 12-, 16- and 20-ft., and square edge (SE) in 20-ft. boards. The product is backed by a 20-year stain, fade and performance limited warranty. Fiberon-Decking.com



continued on page 42

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continued from page 40

BORA, a division of Affinity Tool

The updated Wide Track Clamp Edge series of straight edge guides features solid construction and a wider base. The Wide Track is available in five lengths, including 24-, 42-, 66-, 100-in., and the most recent



addition, the 50-in. model. In addition to cutting-type tasks, the Wide Track can be used for other applications, such as a vise or bar clamp for gluing. Thanks to its integrated T-tracks, the Wide Track can also double as a portable T-track. The

integrated T-track feature is compatible with special T-track jigs and accessories. Not only does this increase the versatility of the Wide Track, it also eliminates the need for an additional T-track. The series is also backed by the company's lifetime warranty. AffinityTool.com/bora



Oly-Ola Edgings Inc.

Oly-Ola has added more pre-cut staking slots to its 100-ft. Super-Edg Landscape Edging Rolls. The additional staking slots are pre-cut into the edging every 2 ft. The increase in pre-cut slots gives landscape contractors more options and the flexibility to decide where to place stakes depending on specific project needs. Oly-Ola provides 25 stakes and two connectors in its 100-ft. Super-Edg Roll package. To securely hold more elaborate installations and designs with lots of joints and curves, Oly-Ola recommends using extra stakes. OlyOla.com

Schröder Lighting US

The energy-efficient NEOS series is designed for floodlighting multiple applications. Three floodlights are offered in four sizes, with power ranging from 35 to 1,000 watts, operating on 120- to 347-volt systems. Three beam spreads are available, including narrow, wide and asymmetrical. The standard NEOS mounting bracket provides a wide range of adjustments. A variety of custom finishes and colors are available. Schröder.US



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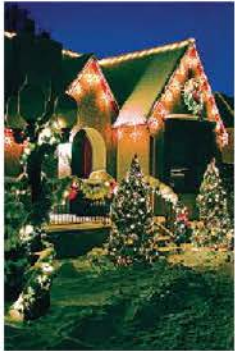


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earn extra income with its program for more than a decade. Additionally, it doesn't charge any royalties or renewal fees. Financial assistance to help you get started is available. Briteldea.com/Home/BusinessOpportunities.aspx



Holiday Bright Lights

With Holiday Bright Lights' (HBL) classroom and webinar training program, companies will be given the proper training to operate a successful and profitable business. HBL's marketing program is designed to work before the lights even go up. Plus, its seasoned personnel have owned their own holiday lighting businesses — and are available to answer any questions — from estimating to installing. HolidayBrightLights.com



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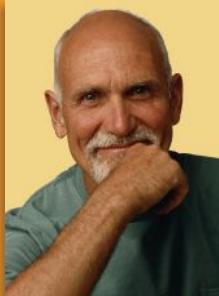
The high-performance Techline CV drip-line is now manufactured with recycled materials — an industry first and a new opportunity to earn LEED credits on land-

scape installations. Techline CV is widely used in a broad range of applications to irrigate turf, trees, shrubs and bedding areas. The 17mm flexible tubing features 2 psi check valves in each dripper for

equalized application of water throughout the system (all drippers turn on and off at the same time). Check valves also prevent low emitter drainage, with elevation changes up to 4.5 ft. The dripper design offers continuous self-flushing throughout the line, not just at the beginning or end of a cycle. Pressure compensation allows equal amounts of water delivered over a broad pressure range (14.7 to 70 psi), and a physical root barrier protects the internal system from root intrusion without chemicals. NetafimUSA.com

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Rain Bird

Featuring a square spray pattern with a throw radius of 2.5 or 4 ft., the SQ Series is designed specifically for watering small, narrow areas of turf and ornamental plantings like those found near walkways, parkways and street medians. Because these unique, low-volume nozzles offer pressure compensation, they use less water and eliminate inefficient overspray — saving time, money and water for both new and existing installations. They can be installed in either head-to-head or edge-to-edge configurations. RainBird.com/landscape/products/sprayNozzles/SQseriesNozzles.htm

WaterOptimizer Inc.

The WaterOptimizer, a smart irrigation system, was named Innovation of the Year at the inaugural Biz-Tech Innovation Summit Awards & Expo held last spring at the Tampa Convention Center. The smart irrigation system takes the next step in technology: Sensor nodes are placed in the ground, designed to measure the amount of water in the soil. Sprinklers only turn on when the ground is dry, and then only long enough to reach the desired moisture level. The system is controlled remotely, using an Internet connection. The wireless mesh network relays information back to the user, giving instant data and immediate control. WaterOptimizer.com





Underhill International

New Water Dex is a palm-sized remote that adjusts sprinkler run times without reprogramming the irrigation controller. Called a "shortcut to seasonal adjustments," the unit includes a 3x2x2-in. mini-transmitter with a 200-ft., line-of-sight range and micro-receiver that hardwires into the irrigation controller. Visible and hands-on, the transmitter can be placed on a desktop or kitchen counter or affixed to a refrigerator door to remind end-users to be water-wise. With WaterDex, contractors have a new opportunity to sell an efficient irrigation add-on to customers. It also saves time on callbacks, because homeowners no longer need to reset their controllers when the seasons change. *Underhill.us*

The Bauer Group

The Rainstar A3 high-efficiency irrigation system is precise, rugged and ideally suited for golf courses, playing fields, horticulture, parks and gardens, municipal recreation centers and agriculture. In one irrigation run, the sprinkler covers up to 230 ft. side-to-side over a maximum irrigated length of 656 ft. A second strip opposite the first area can be irrigated following the initial run, without having to change the position of the unit — providing efficiency and saving labor. The unit features a galvanized pipe reel that swivels easily through 180°, and can be assembled by a single operator. *Bauer-AT.com*

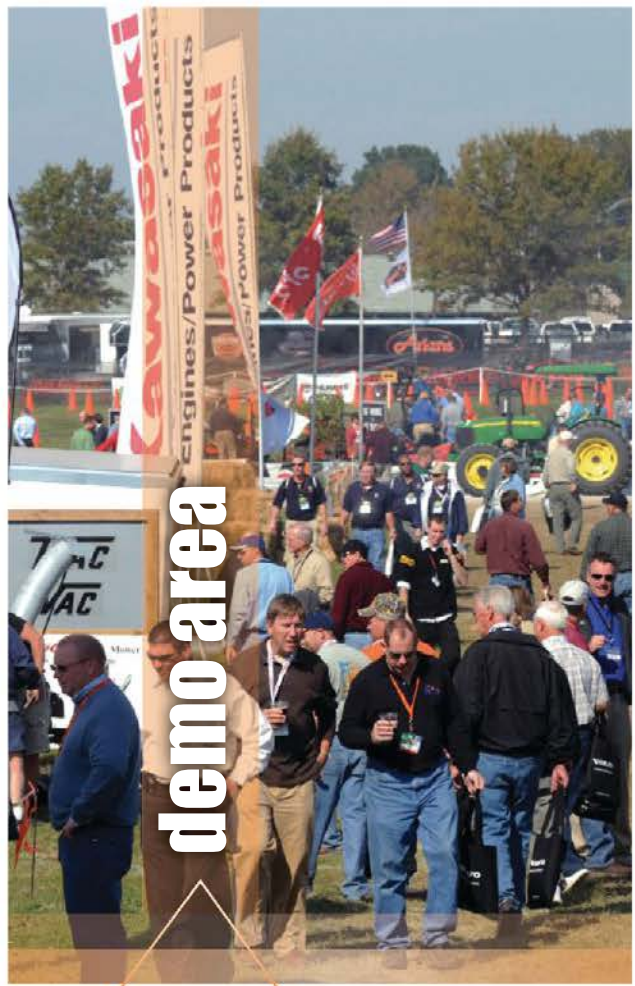
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BEST PRACTICES

BRUCE WILSON

The author, of the Wilson-Oyler Group, is a 30-year industry veteran. Reach him at bwilson@questex.com.

Measure for success

We all want to get the best from our teams. Certainly, our employees want to give their best. But how do we inspire great performance and motivate for continued success?

Thomas Edison said genius is 1% inspiration and 99% perspiration. In trying to improve performance, there is one tried-and-true path to success: Measure and keep score. People respond when they have measurable goals. It starts early in life when

they get their first report cards. They thrive on positive recognition from their parents and teachers when they do well.

The same is true of employees. If you give them a way to measure their performance, they will work hard to hit their targets. Not all people ultimately meet their goals. But this helps you, as a manager, identify those who need extra training or support, or who may be in the wrong position.

When identifying measurable goals, consider some of the common targets used in the landscape industry to improve profits and drive growth:

➤ **Hours-to-budget:** This can be used to give crew lead-

ers time management objectives, or hours spent on each job. Most companies develop budgeted hours from their estimates of how long the job will take.

One of the best ways to use this measure is to post the hours and efficiency rankings of each crew at a central location where crew leaders regularly meet. Posting can bring out the competitive instinct

of the crew and encourage goal-driven behavior. It motivates the weaker members of the team.

➤ **Ratio of enhancement sales to contract sales:** This ratio is used by many companies to give account managers sales targets for enhancement services. You can look at your historical records to see what that ratio has been. It varies widely in the industry because of variances in what companies classify as “enhancements.” For example, some consider enhancements to be improvements to the landscape while others consider any extra billing, such as mulch, an enhancement.

Because of this inconsistency, some companies sell 25% enhancements as a percent of the contract price, while others might sell as much as 100%. Either way it gives tangible targets to each account manager — and helps improve your enhancement sales. Again, another posting opportunity: Track the ongoing effort, publish the results and unleash the competitive juices.

Enhancement opportunities can vary widely. Some types of clients tend to spend more, so the goals should be developed with your market and your book of business in mind.

➤ **Hours billed as a ratio of hours worked for irrigation technicians:** This has been a good tool to make sure that everything gets billed. Many companies have trouble with small jobs falling through the cracks and not getting billed. Try to measure and score your technicians on this, and billing will most likely go up.

Goals for new contract sales

The most successful salespeople are goal-driven. They are also competitive. Tracking their new business is an obvious first step, but don't stop there. Keep score on the number of proposals generated and dollar volume of each. Track and post. Measure activity: How many sales leads actually make it to the finish line and are closed?

By using multiple measures, you can encourage your salespeople to generate the right amount of activity and hit their goals every step of the way.

SUCCESS HAS ITS REWARDS

Essential to implementing measurable goals is identifying what the rewards are for meeting defined targets. Compensation is always effective, but so, too, are public recognition and the high-five of a job well done.

Keep in mind, though, that a solely reward-driven culture can become counter-productive. If the rewards are too great, it will eventually drive the behavior to become negative. For instance, there have been situations where so much focus is placed on performing the job quickly that quality suffers. Or an account manager tries to sell so many enhancements to meet goals, that customers feel they are being nicked and dimed.

Instead, inspire to perspire. You can never say “thank you” enough. Give lots of recognition and set consistent, measurable goals with realistic rewards, and you'll find a high-performing team willing to give you their best.



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PROJECT PORTFOLIO

A SCRAPBOOK OF DESIGN/BUILD OVERHAULS

Functional elegance

THE MISSION

Create a landscape deserving of this beautiful 1920s Georgia residence.

The clients' Atlanta home had wonderful lines, architecture and charm; their landscape did not. That's where Roswell, GA-based Ed Castro Landscape came in.

Led by landscape architect Chris Hopper, the majority of the existing, outdated landscape was removed — and new gardens were created that were both functional and aesthetically pleasing.

The biggest challenge on the project, according to the team, was “creating a landscape that would complement the style of the home, tying historical elements to the present without compromising the home's Old World charm.”

To accomplish the twin goals of practicality and beauty, portions of the driveway were removed to allow for decorative cobblestone banding and inlays. A combination of brick and granite cobblestone inlay was constructed in the center of the rear motor court. These updates using such authentic period materials properly accentuated the home, Hopper notes.

No part of the perimeter escaped the touch of the Ed Castro team. The side entry to the home was just as bland and empty as the front entrance, with meager plantings and harsh hardscapes in need of some soft decoration. New plantings at the side entrance updated the space, while new containers and topiary plantings were added to decorate the large stoop.

Other elements included a new back patio, a fireplace, a pool with connected spa, and other formal garden spaces. The outdoor entertainment area is just a few steps away from the pool, making it both a convenient and functional outdoor space.



PHOTOS COURTESY: EMILY DRYDEN PHOTOGRAPHY



3



4



5



6

THE WORK

1 | Best foot forward. Granite cobbles were installed to decorate the edges of the driveway. The entire front and side entrances were replanted with colors and forms to better accent the architecture of the home.

2 | Form meets function. After removing all existing portions of the backyard patio, a new and more modern patio was installed. It includes a seat wall, an enlarged terrace and an outdoor kitchen — to create a more functional entertaining space.

3 | Serene space. Herringbone brick paving, a stacked bluestone fireplace and a decorative pergola unite to create a cozy entertainment space — just steps away from the pool.

4 | The view from above. From up in the guesthouse, there is a delightful view of the pool and all its features, including three sheer descents, an in-ground spa and a terrace for lounging.

5 | Cutting edge. The crisp lines and formal spaces of this landscape design are evident in the pool terrace area, stepping-stone pathways, rear lawn and cherry tree alley.

6 | Rear alignment. A bare and unattractive lawn area in the rear yard was unused, empty and just waiting for a more functional design. It turned out to be the perfect space for a pool to be aligned on axis with the rear doors of the home, and accompany a gathering space with an outdoor fireplace.

Ed Castro Landscape's services include sustainable design, installation and maintenance for both commercial and residential accounts. In addition, its horticulture capabilities include smart planning/seasonal color, garden design and installation, technical pruning, water management, lawn reduction/renovation and organic disease and pest control. This particular project garnered a 41st Annual Environmental Improvement Grand Award from the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). For more information, visit EdCastro.com.

Drip irrigation

Takehara Landscape Designs, Gardena, CA looks to innovative products for more flexibility.



Drip irrigation allows for precise placement of water.

WHEN NATHAN TAKEHARA saw an up-to-date drip irrigation system at an industry trade show six years ago, he was surprised. He had recently relocated his landscape business to southern California from Hawaii, where he had been using what he now calls “primitive products.” The drip system on display was radically different from what he’d been installing, and it offered a range of innovative features that would give him greater design flexibility — and help him build his business.

Takehara Landscape Designs is known for creating authentic Japanese-style landscapes. Clients who desire a traditional Japanese garden have certain images in mind: a landscape that creates a sense of serenity; traditional plants and features; perhaps a koi pond, a waterfall or river rock stream.

To create a dramatic Asian garden — or any complex design with angles and curves, ponds and garden walls — Takehara needed irrigation products that would be flexible.

“It was clear to me that to expand our design business, we had to include the newest drip products in our plans,” he says. “It was the best way to ensure creativity, water conservation and minimal maintenance.”

Becoming a drip expert did not require any capital outlay or extensive training, Takehara says. He and his crew had been installing overhead systems for years, and already had the tools and knowledge. After a couple on-site “tutorials,” and a little research and reading, Takehara and his lead installer had it figured out after the first job.

“I made the right contacts when I decided to install Netafim Techline CV on a project,” he says. “The company’s sales rep was very helpful and patient and guided me through the entire process. It was hands-on training, and it really paid off.

“Now I use both 17mm and new

12mm on-surface drip line, depending on the site,” Takehara continues. “The 12mm is ideal for smaller beds, hardscape channels, garden walls or other creative features. Both products are self-flushing and pressure-compensating, and 17mm has check valves.”

Takehara says that anyone who is familiar with landscape irrigation can expand into drip. The same controllers, valves and irrigation lines are used, but instead of rigid PVC, it’s flexible tubing. There’s virtually no additional expense. Drip line costs about the same as rigid pipe, but neither PVC glue nor cement are needed because drip tubing has barbed or insert fittings.”

“Clients are enthusiastic about drip because they see new benefits,” says Takehara. “Drip delivers water directly to the root zones slowly, and at lower pressure. Plants flourish because they get the precise amount of water they need. There is no overspray or water running down the gutter. This all means substantial water savings — and it’s good for the environment because today’s tubing is made from recycled materials.”

Major municipalities, like Los Angeles County, are promoting the use of drip line for all those same reasons. And with new regional mandates across the U.S. to cut water use, drip is becoming increasingly popular.

“Drip irrigation allowed us to focus on the type of installations that we wanted to do,” Takehara points out. “It’s very compatible with the clean, refined look of contemporary architecture as well as traditional gardens.”

His advice to contractors is to not be “squeamish” about drip irrigation.

“It’s the future. Expand your capabilities, and you’ll earn more money,” he says. “...You’ll also see the benefits of a new business niche, healthier landscapes and water-wise environment.”

The author is a partner at Hardwick Creative Services and writes about landscape irrigation.

>> SERVICE SNAPSHOT

WHY DRIP IRRIGATION: Drip’s design flexibility and water-saving features helped Nathan Takehara carve out a new niche for his business while attracting more clients interested in his specialized services.

INITIAL INVESTMENT: No capital expense if a contractor is already installing overhead irrigation systems and has the basic tools. Hands-on training is a must, and can often be arranged with a manufacturer’s rep.

WHY CUSTOMERS LIKE IT: Water costs are lower because irrigation is applied in a more precise manner; plants, trees and shrubs are healthier; overspray is eliminated, along with run-off and erosion; there’s less maintenance; and it’s eco-friendly because new drip lines are made with recycled content.

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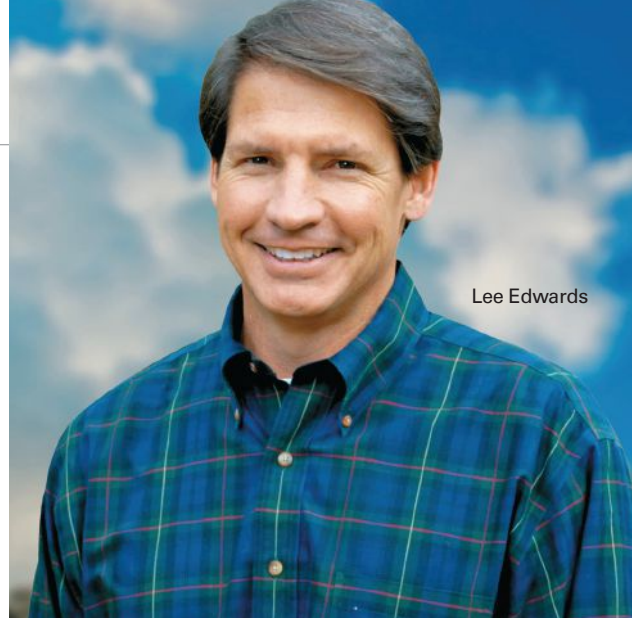
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Lee Edwards

In 2001, Hilton Head, SC-based landscape company The Greenery began transitioning to an employee-owned company. Now, The Greenery has been entirely owned by its employees for more than three years. The structure, says The Greenery President and Chief Executive Officer **Lee Edwards**, has spurred “an ownership mentality among employees, which in turn fosters more teamwork, better communication and better morale among a diverse workforce.”

For a landscape company that focuses on projects and properties requiring complex construction and special attention to detail, having that strong employee partnership is vital. It fuels workers’ passion for the job, Edwards says, as he stops to share with *LM* what is driving the maintenance industry as a whole.

TOP TRENDS

› **Sustainability.** Sustainability seems to be the word of the day, and Hilton Head was founded as one of the original “green” communities in the country. We are trying to sell our customers on better, more efficient irrigation systems, organic turf and ornamental management, and use of more native species.

› **Innovations in technology and communications.** As gas prices increase and as the economy improves, driving up labor costs, we are seeing more equipment innovations than ever. Everyone will need to look at the way they have been doing business, and reassess how they will cope in the near future. Being efficient will not be an option.

These days, most customers want it all: fair price, quality service and good communication, so we give it to them. Communication is something that has changed dramatically over the past couple of years. Now all of our supervisors have mobile communication devices so they can email, text and talk to customers about their properties in real time, as well as send photographs. The days of sending a monthly report to a property manager or property owners association board are over. Now they want immediate communication.

TOP OBSTACLE

› **The economy.** The economic downturn in real estate development has affected us, as well as most areas of the country. For years, our bread

and butter was new resorts, hotels, golf clubs and high-end residential real estate developments up and down the coast of South Carolina and Georgia. When we finished landscaping a new

development, that fed directly into our maintenance business. Now, if we want new maintenance business, we have to go out and get it rather than let it come to us. This has made us change the way we do business. Painful in the short-term, but now that we have made the adjustments, we are seeing success.

INSIDE INFO

Company: The Greenery

Headquarters: Hilton Head, SC

Employees: 400

2010 revenue: \$25.2 million

Key to being a maintenance leader: Having great people willing to lead. If we have that, we can be innovative and stay ahead of the competition. Our people are our greatest asset, not our greatest cost. We usually find that we are on the leading edge of service, product quality and innovative methodologies used in the Green Industry. This makes us more attractive to prospective employees, which helps us recruit and retain long-term employees. It also sets us apart from some of our competitors.

Over the last couple of years, we have seen a gradual transition as everyone starts to realize they all have a serious stake in the long-term success of the company. This is something that truly sets us apart from our competition, both internally — happy employees with little turnover — and externally — high performance output among the workforce. We as management see it, but it is even more rewarding when our clients notice the difference.

TOP OPPORTUNITIES

› **Working with institutions.** Acquiring work from institutions such as schools, the military and governmental agencies is something we have never pursued very hard in the past. But now we are, and we are doing it successfully. In the past, many of these institutions have done their landscaping in-house. But in recent years, many of these folks are realizing that outsourcing of landscape services is not only more cost-effective, but gets them higher quality as well. The level of quality being demanded in some of those markets is trending up. We are taking advantage of these opportunities, and have won several of these contracts.

› **A larger available workforce from which to choose employees.** Over the last couple of years in a bad economy, we are seeing many new faces looking for jobs. Some of these folks are not who we might normally see looking for a landscaping job, and that gives us an opportunity to tap into a larger workforce. This past spring, we were looking to hire about 20 full-time and 20 seasonal crew members, so we held a job fair. Over two days, we had over 200 people show up. Many of these people want some upward mobility in a company, and we are able to provide that opportunity to the right individuals. This is the right time for us to invest in people, training and overall skills improvement.



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MYBIGGESTMISTAKE

LESSONS LEARNED THE HARD WAY » BY CASEY PAYTON



Rooting out employee problems from the start can prevent serious costs and problems.

CHRIS LEE, PRESIDENT of Texas-based EarthWorks Inc., has learned to tackle employee problems practically from the moment they appear. In fact, Lee has realized that even small issues, which seem like isolated incidents, can be warning signs of larger problems to come. It's a lesson Lee says was costly for his company — and it's why he made some important changes.

After a \$25,000 workers' comp claim that Lee is convinced was illegitimate, he found himself thinking about the employee's time at the company. The warning signs were there, but the problems all began as small and seemingly unrelated incidents.

"What we've figured out is that almost any time you have a serious employee problem, whether it's an illegitimate workers' comp claim, insubordination or even a potential lawsuit, it can almost always be traced back to something that should have alerted you early on," says Lee. "Maybe it's a customer complaint, or a complaint from one of your foremen. It seems like something small, but it's not."

Lee says that one of the roadblocks to putting two and two together at his company was poor communication. The customer service department may have gotten a complaint about an employee from

a client, and the foreman might have been having problems — but unless all of this was communicated, it made the issues seem small and isolated.

"When there's a truly problematic employee, there's almost always a pattern, so it's important that everyone is in communication," says Lee. "What we now do differently is host a daily production meeting. The meeting involves every manager in the company, from customer service to operations to HR. That way, we can bring up any employee complaint and address it right away."

Avoid complacency

Addressing it right away is a large part of the solution. Lee says it can be tempting to let an employee problem slide because it's not always easy to find laborers, even in this economy.

"This is tough work, so it can be hard to find people who want to do the job," he admits. "At times you're short-handed or in the middle of a job, and you feel like you just want to squeeze a couple more days out of an employee before you address the issue — but that's inevitably when something will go horribly bad."

"We've learned that no matter how much we need the job to be done, we need to protect our business even more. It can be hard to accept, but it's better to lose a little production

time than to jeopardize the whole company."

Now, from the very first time Lee gets a complaint about an employee, he takes immediate action. He has implemented a two-strike policy: "The first time we get the complaint, we reassign them to a different crew and tell them that they have a strike," says Lee. "That gives them a fresh start. We understand that sometimes it's just a personality conflict, and we don't want to fire someone if they might work well in a different crew. But we make sure the employee understands that if we get complaints from their new crew, that we have to get rid of them."

Lee says he's also learned some of the red flags that can alert him an employee might turn out to be a problem. It's often evident from the very first week on the job, he adds.

"Anytime you get an employee that does the bare minimum or doesn't want to work, it's a person who can turn out to be a real problem," he warns.

If issues aren't addressed immediately, Lee says, they can affect a crew's morale.

"Once you let just a little bit of that poison into the water, it can take a great group of guys and cause them to suddenly feel like they're working too hard or not getting paid enough," he says. "That's a bad situation that you need to prevent from the start."

Payton is a freelance writer with six years of experience covering landscaping.



Chris Lee



COMPANY: EarthWorks Inc.

HEADQUARTERS: Lillian, TX

2010 REVENUE: \$13.5 million

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 300

SERVICES: 65% maintenance; 25% installation; 5% tree trimming and removal; 5% irrigation and repair

CLIENTELE: 100% commercial

One size does not fit all.



Junior-36
200 lb. Granular
18 Gallon Liquid

Junior
200 lb. Granular
18 Gallon Liquid

Intermediate
300 lb. Granular
18 Gallon Liquid

Z-Max
300 lb. Granular
50 Gallon Liquid
(shown with
optional foam
marker kit)

Sprayer Standard Features:

- **Stainless Steel Construction**
- **50' - 100' Hose Reel**
- **16 HP Vanguard Commercial**
- **Constant By-pass Agitation**
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