



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.