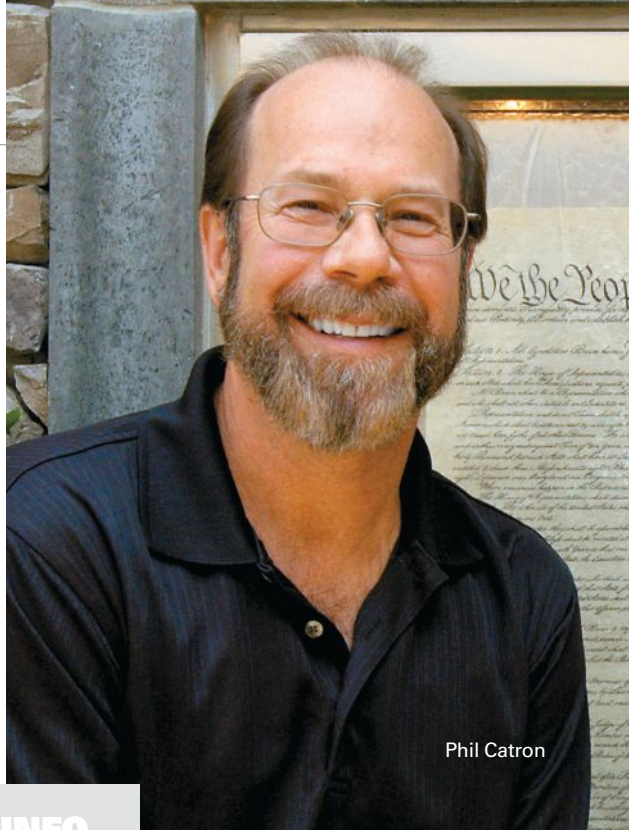


In 2012, NaturaLawn of America will celebrate its 25th anniversary. The company opened its first office in Damascus, MD in 1987, moving its corporate headquarters to Frederick, MD two years later. NaturaLawn has grown exponentially since then, and now it operates more than 60 offices in 24 states. Company President **Philip Catron** discusses with *LM* the opportunities and challenges NaturaLawn is facing today.



Phil Catron

TOP TRENDS

› **Environmental awareness.** The industry will continue to look for ways to not only reduce any potential negative environmental impact from our work, but also create and discover new methods for doing "old" techniques. While continued state regulations will potentially impact our industry, those businesses that make operational decisions as to how to work with the regulations as opposed to trying to combat them will end up being better off.

› **More targeted marketing efforts.** As a matter of economic survival, smaller and mid-sized businesses desiring to not only survive but also grow, will become more focused in their strategic marketing efforts. They will cease trying to be a one-stop shop for consumers.

This will give them a stronger financial position and foundation from which to move into the future. There will also be many opportunities for smaller businesses that want to conduct joint ventures with or completely merge with mid-sized companies, offering smaller businesses a chance to grow.

TOP OBSTACLE

› **Attracting the right employees.** The industry in general continues to face issues in finding or attracting personnel who really want to learn about what we all do and grow with a company. There is a need for community colleges and vocational schools to recruit and train students, implement Green Industry-related programs and arrange internships with businesses. All of those things will help educate and train future generations for opportunities our industry can offer them.

INSIDE INFO

Company: NaturaLawn

Headquarters: Frederick, MD

Employees: 275

2010 revenue: \$37,750,000

Key to being a maintenance leader: For any business to lead, it must first take care of its people. When a company truly cares for and ensures that its employees' needs are being met or exceeded, then the employees will in turn treat the customers in an equitable fashion. The customers will then take care of the company by buying their products and services. When this happens, the company will automatically become a leader.

While many books have been written about leadership and what it takes to be a leader, perhaps the most succinct instructions I have ever heard on this subject were from listening to a presentation by General Norman Schwarzkopf, one of the most brilliant army officers our military has been blessed with. His response to a very similar question on leadership was simply, "Make a decision and do the right thing." That's pretty hard to beat, and if the advice is followed, I don't think one can go wrong.

TOP OPPORTUNITIES

› **Growing demand for our work.** Even though the economy is not growing in many sectors, there is currently more demand and interest for what we do than ever before. Expansion opportunities are only limited by two things: not having enough qualified personnel and being limited in financial resources. We are fortunate in that our ongoing operations are able to provide internal funding for growth. We also have several outside financial sources available to us should we need to draw on reserves.

› **Our employee ownership program.** To help us address the need for qualified personnel, several years ago we instituted an employee ownership program where every person in our organization is given an opportunity to own their own NaturaLawn of America business. The program gives employees financial credit toward ownership over a four-year vesting period. After three years, employees can exercise their option in ownership and receive a 75% credit. Or if they choose to wait an additional year, they get 100% of the option.

During the vesting time period, we conduct an ongoing management training program with those employees who have expressed an interest in ownership or who management has identified as having the characteristics we are looking for. The training program covers all aspects of the NaturaLawn of America business. It is an intense program utilizing not only classroom instruction but also in-field experience and mentoring with upper management.