

# The Grounds Guys

**R**eginald Schram never pictured himself in the landscape industry. Though his work in the interior design/architecture world with RRS & Associates, his own interior design and facilities planning firm in Ontario, had some parallels with landscaping, it wasn't a field he knew much about. But then he encountered The Grounds Guys, a commercial maintenance franchise group that also offers snow removal and other winter services for northern U.S. businesses. So when Schram was ready to expand his business ventures two years ago, he approached them. Two franchises later, he realizes it was a very good business decision.

Schram's first Grounds Guys experience was actually with Sunshine Grounds Care (before they became part of The Grounds Guys franchise line-up). They were hired to do the landscaping for a client he was working with. Schram was impressed by their professionalism. "I believe in appearance and detail since, as a designer, I'm often meeting with company presidents," says Schram. "I run my business wearing a suit and tie. In the same way, The Grounds Guys projected a very professional appearance with their uniforms and trucks."

The Grounds Guys was an attractive opportunity for Schram because of the systems the company offered. He knew it would allow them to launch the franchise, even without a history in the landscaping industry. From the start they felt the company's systems ensured a franchisee is never on his or her own. That feeling was strengthened when his franchise recently had to manage one of the first big storms of a new snow season.

"The corporate office has a system

in place called a 'Care Ticket,' where a property manager can call an 800 number and let them know their issues, such as needing more salt," explains Schram. "The receptionist takes the message and emails us the Care Ticket. We have three hours to respond to the property manager and 'close' the ticket. That allows our guys to not have to worry about answering the phones, which would stop them from salting and plowing. When they get a break, they can respond to the ticket. It's just one small way the company is looking out for us."

Another way Schram feels corporate has supported him is through their sales efforts in a tight economy. "The company has actually helped us get leads, which shows their investment," he says. "We'll get calls saying they have a contract available for us. The company has people on staff who go knocking on doors on our behalf. I'd say it's a large percent of our total sales."

Of the lessons Schram says has resonated most with him is to work *on* the business, not *in* it. It's something that corporate really pushes in their seminars and something he wishes he'd learned 30 years ago with his design firm. "They don't want you out there doing the cutting and plowing. They teach you how to run and manage the business so you can walk away and your business would still be operating."

Using McDonald's as an example to teach this in their seminars, The Grounds Guys' leaders talk about synergy. "No matter what McDonald's you go to, it's the same product — the same brand," says Schram. "They want us to have



## PROFILE

*Business owner:* Reg Schram

*Headquarters:* Brantford, Ontario

*Franchise owner timeframe:* 2 years

*Tips for contractors interested in franchises:*

**Trust your gut.** You need to understand and trust the people you're dealing with. If after that initial handshake you walk away with a good gut feeling and confidence, then you'll know it's right. But if you don't know the people you're dealing with or have some insecurity, you may need to walk away for good.

**Look at the structure.** It's important to know what systems the company already has in place that will make your job easier; Something that will allow you to just walk in and get started right away. Make sure that structure is one that's going to make you feel supported as a franchisee.

**Find balance.** Make sure it's a company that embraces family life. As a new franchise owner you can get sucked into working around the clock. Find a company that cares about your personal goals. That balance will make you more successful in your business, too.

that same philosophy. Any Grounds Guys franchise has the same professional employee, truck and service. They look alike, but they also operate alike, allowing the franchise owners to put the structures in place and then walk away from the day-to-day activity, focusing more on the overall picture."

Schram says the systems in place allow him more of an opportunity to succeed. Corporate seminars provide constant training and updates, while they also offer manuals and guides with anything the franchise owner would need to know to run the business — from accounting to receiving the appropriate paperwork and forms that may be needed.

Looking toward the future, Schram is hopeful about growing the business, and leaving a legacy for his son. "One of the things they stress in the seminars is the importance of having a personal life and a family," he says. "It's the type of business I am proud to be involved in."

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