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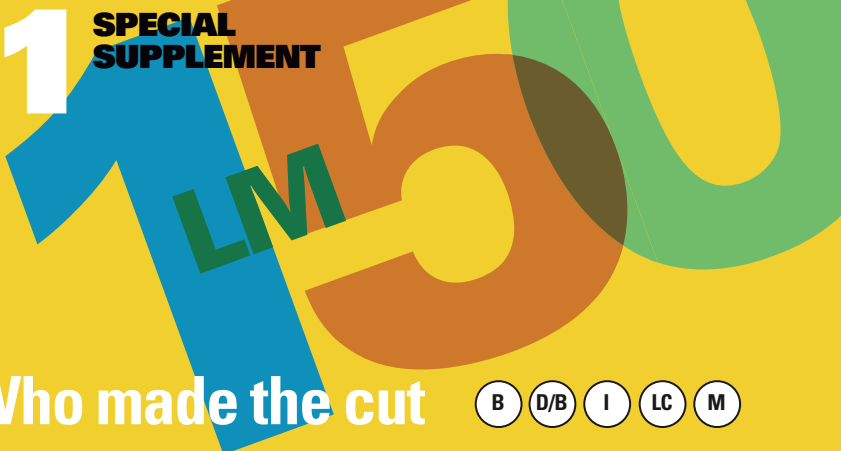
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THE LM DAILY

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600 SUPERIOR AVE. EAST SUITE 1100
CLEVELAND OH 44114 800/669-1668

EDITORIAL STAFF

Editorial Director Marty Whitford 216/706-3766 | mwhitford@questex.com

Editor-in-Chief Daniel G. Jacobs 216/706-3754 | djacobs@questex.com

Editor-at-Large Ron Hall 216/706-3739 | rhall@questex.com

Senior Editor Beth Geraci 216/706-3756 | bgeraci@questex.com

Contributing Editors Heather & Jamie Gooch 330/723-3539 | heather@goochandgooch.com, jamie@goochandgooch.com

Art Director Carrie Parkhill 216/706-3780 | cparkhill@questex.com

ADVERTISING STAFF

Publisher Patrick Roberts 216/706-3736 Fax: 216/706-3712 | proberts@questex.com

Northern National Sales Manager Dave Huisman 732/493-4951 Fax: 732/493-4951 | dhuisman@questex.com

Southern National Sales Manager Jason DeSarle 216/706-3758 Fax: 216/706-3712 | jdesarle@questex.com

Business Development Manager Ric Abernethy 216/706-3723 Fax: 216/706-3712 | rabernethy@questex.com

Account Executive Classifieds Kelli Velasquez 216/706-3767 Fax: 216/706-3712 | kvelasquez@questex.com

BUSINESS STAFF

Vice President Kevin Stoltman 216/706-3740 | kstoltman@questex.com

Administrative Coordinator Petra Turko 216/706-3768 | pturko@questex.com

Production Manager Amber Terch 218/206-2129 | Amber.terch@superiormediasolutions.net

Production Director Jamie Kleist 218/206-2107 | Jamie.kleist@superiormediasolutions.net

Audience Development Manager Carol Hatcher 216/706-3785 | chatcher@questex.com

MARKETING/MAGAZINE SERVICES

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Lessons learned the hard way

The hardest story I ever had to write came early in my journalism career. Actually, it came before my professional career officially started. I was still studying at the University of Cincinnati that Sunday when I walked into the school's newsroom. As the news editor it was part of my job to check with the campus information office to review the previous day's events.

That's when I came across the campus police report.

Sometime in the wee hours of the morning after a long night of partying, a student visiting from another school woke in the middle of the night, and perhaps confused and unsure of where he was, tumbled from the dorm room window. He crashed through an iron gate to the cement loading dock 11 floors below. The police report indicated his friends identified him by his clothing; he'd suffered too much "facial trauma" to be identified any other way.

It was a difficult story to write for many reasons, not the least of which were the sad nature of the events and the anger and disdain directed at me after the article appeared in print.

That was the day I became a journalist. I learned more about being a writer from that and my subsequent time at the paper than I did in any of my classes. Sure, I learned theory and style in the classroom, but my real teachers were my fellow editors and daily experiences in the

newsroom and around campus.

I suspect much of what you know about business comes from the challenges you face running your company. Maybe you took some classes on your way to a degree, but it wasn't until you started running your own company that the real lessons kicked in.

Little did we know the downturn and recession we've suffered the past few years would send us all back to school — and what a harsh headmistress. Consider it a master's class in business practice.

The recession might have officially ended, but with the housing market (mostly) still suffering, it looks like a long slow haul before we return to more solid footing.

If this is your first recession you're learning the lessons and strategies that will make your company stronger, leaner and more profitable, strategies that will serve you well when prices stabilize and customers start spending again.

We share some of those lessons as part of *LM's* annual Top 150 coverage. It seems some of the biggest companies in the industry are getting some of their mojo back. Not everyone grew, but a significant number did. We talk to them about the lessons they learned during the recession, how this downturn compared with others and how their businesses are forever changed because of it.

Our Top 150 coverage also includes a look at the up and comers — the young guns just off the Top 150 list (and maybe a couple who just found their way on) to find out how they fared against the biggest in the industry.

There's also a story about the fastest growing companies. When the economy is in turmoil there's always a shakeout — winners and losers. Even in a recession several companies grew at double-digit rates.

Finally there are the lists. In addition to a listing of the largest Green Industry enterprises, we'll show you who does the most business in your region of the country. It all begins on page S1.

It seems **some of the biggest companies in the industry** are getting some of their mojo back.



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WINNING WAYS

Landscape Management and *Golfdom's* continued commitment to delivering quality products results in 21 TOCA awards.

Questex Media Group is pleased to announce its brands *Landscape Management* and *Golfdom* together earned 21 awards at the annual Turf and Ornamental Communicators Association (TOCA) awards ceremony. The ceremony took place in May in Asheville, NC.

Landscape Management reaped 13 honors, while *Golfdom* brought home eight awards. The magazines earned

accolades for writing, new media, special projects and graphic design.

"I'm proud to be part of a team that has garnered 37 TOCA awards in the last three years and 26 more than our closest competitor (TLC)," said Patrick Roberts, publisher of *Landscape Management* and *Golfdom*. "We place a high value on TOCA as an association and always appreciate being recognized by such an influential group of professionals."

Landscape Management team members won honors for cover page design ("The Innovation Lab"); writing (Nicole Wisniewski's feature "Oil & Water"); special projects ("The Industry Pulse Report"); and social media (the *LM* blog).

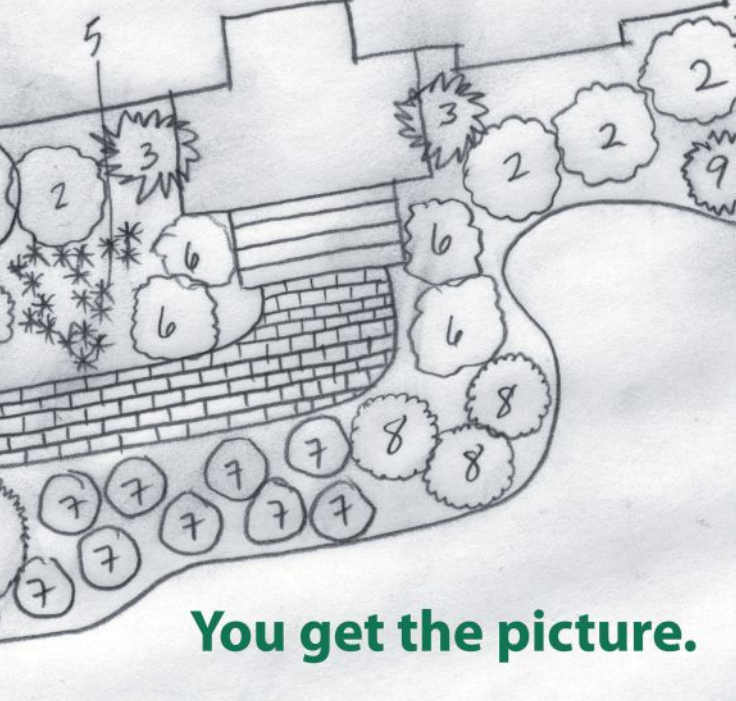
The magazines' staff members also were honored with nine merit awards. Among the recipients were newly promoted *Landscape Management* editor Dan Jacobs for his "A Cut Above" series; Ron Hall for his "Water Wise" series; Hall, Wisniewski and Jacobs for their story "The Big Give"; Wisniewski for innovative use of social media; and Hall for his editorial "Victims of our own promises?"

Golfdom earned six first-place awards, including one for feature writing ("Giving Thanks"); Web writing ("A Golf Course Uplifts a Community"); writing for commercial publications ("Plant Health Report" and "Water Wise"); and headline writing ("I'll Take a...Mulligan"). *Golfdom* also won first place for portrait photography with the June 2010 cover photo of Chris Dalhamer.

Golfdom also won two merit awards. "The Best of Both Worlds" won for environmental stewardship article, and the 2010 Annual Putting Surface Guide for special projects. *Golfdom* editor Seth Jones won merits for his work last year at *Golf Course Management* magazine, for his operations profile of Whistling Straits and his cover story on Nick Price.



PHOTO BY BETH GERACI



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ServiceMaster's Mullany seeks to re-energize TruGreen

BY RON HALL EDITOR-AT-LARGE

TruGreen LawnCare interim president Thomas G. Brackett has been given the task of improving the performance of the nation's biggest lawn care company.

ServiceMaster chief executive officer Hank Mullany, during ServiceMaster's first-quarter earnings call May 25, said he asked Brackett to focus on three things:

1. Improving customers' experience with TruGreen service, both the results they see on their lawns and also their experience with technicians;

2. Building a culture of "executional excellence" by accelerating the development and sharing of best practices among TruGreen branches as well as between ServiceMaster's Terminix divi-

sion and TruGreen; and

3. More rigorously evaluating and developing TruGreen managerial talent.

One of Mullany's first tasks as ServiceMaster CEO was to replace former TruGreen President Stephen Donly with Brackett, who also serves as president of Terminix. As of this report ServiceMaster was continuing its search for a new president for TruGreen ChemLawn. Mullany emphasized Terminix and TruGreen will remain separate divisions.

"We need to fix our TruGreen LawnCare business," said Mullany, who took over as CEO of ServiceMaster in February on the resignation of J. Patrick Spainhour. Mullany said he spent much of his first 100 days visiting branch operations and talking to ServiceMaster franchise owners.

Mullany said TruGreen, which he asserted has a 12% market penetration, must do a better job of converting non-users into customers and also of retaining customers.

"Our customer service hasn't been good enough or consistent enough," he said, pointing out that although the division's revenues are ahead of 2010, they are still below 2007 levels, which he termed "simply unacceptable."

TruGreen posted operating losses of \$10.4 million in the first quarter, although its revenues were up 10% in the first quarter from the same period in 2010.

ServiceMaster brands include TruGreen, Terminix, American Home Shield, ServiceMaster Clean and Merry Maids. Its 5,000 locations and franchises deliver services to homes and businesses.

SPRINTURF ACQUIRES IC IMPROVEMENTS

Sprinturf, an artificial turf company based in Valley Forge, PA, has acquired Ontario, Canada-based IC Improvements (ICI).

The new company in Canada, to be called Sprinturf-ICI Canada, will be, Sprinturf stated, the first fully integrated Canadian turf company with all manufacturing done in house.

In announcing the acquisition, Rom Reddy, managing partner of ITS-Sprinturf Holdings LLC, said in a release, "The acquisition of ICI, one of the top Canadian artificial turf companies, builds on Sprinturf's strategy of growing the athletic business geographically and broadening the base of Sprinturf into non-athletic applications."

Report shows Bayer strengthening commitment to sustainability

LEVERKUSEN, GERMANY — Bayer is presenting its Sustainable Development Report for 2010 and strengthening its commitment to sustainability. At more than 72 pages, the newly published report documents the progress made in the key areas of climate protection, health care provision and nutrition for a growing world population and further achievements made by the Group in the field of sustainability.

"We use our commitment to sustainability to tackle the key global challenges and drive forward economic growth in harmony with ecological and social interests," said Dr. Wolfgang Plischke, member of the Bayer AG Board of Management responsible for Innovation, Technology and Environment.

The Bayer Sustainable Development Report 2010 and further information is available online at www.sustainability.bayer.com.

Plischke (right) with UN's W. Engshuber.



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Scotts Professional becomes Everris

The Scotts Miracle-Gro Company sold its Professional Division to the ICL Group in February. Then, on May 25, executives from Scotts Professional and ICL Specialty Fertilizers announced a new name for the global business: Everris.

The name Everris, which means “green” in Spanish, French and Italian, represents the new company’s commitment to further improving the technologies, products and services it offers worldwide.

Everris will continue to develop plant nutrition brands and products, including Osmocote, Peters, Universol, Agriform and more. According to Everris CEO Fred Bosch, the company’s new tagline, “Ever Rising,” emphasizes its goal of providing ornamental horticulture growers, turf managers, landscapers and farmers



with professional products and innovative, sustainable solutions to their problems.

Everris will strive to maintain the momentum generated by its recent products for container nursery stock growers, continuing to emphasize the company’s goal of delivering environmentally sound products.

“For years, we’ve helped growers and turf managers to design smarter nutritional programs and plant protection programs that often combine our unique technologies (such as controlled, slow

release, water soluble and foliar) to feed plants exactly what they need, when they need it,” Bosch stated in a release. “Everris combines the technical expertise and resources of both Scotts and ICL, making us well-poised to take our innovative spirit to the next level.”

In the United Kingdom, Everris recently registered PlantTrust, a new product featuring Controlled Release Control (CRC) technology. Based on the principles of controlled-release fertilizer technology, PlantTrust releases starter nutrients while protecting against the pathogen phytophthora.

According to Everris, the combination of nutrition and plant protection results from years of development and more than 100 scientific field trials. Within the next few years, Everris will introduce PlantTrust to other European countries.

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PROGRESS

Moving forward

A look at how the industry's national organizations have evolved since their early days

The Green Industry has changed dramatically over the years, and — whether eagerly or reluctantly — its national organizations have evolved with it.

Gone are the days when landscape professionals didn't concern themselves with regulations, when sharing ideas was their primary focus.

In their place is a booming landscape industry that has grown exponentially from its more modest beginnings. It's confronted now by controversial environmental, immigration and water-related regulations.

Despite the changes, industry movers and shakers of past and present say the mutual support of fellow landscape professionals is one thing that hasn't changed.

The Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA) original board member Tom Leid said what appealed to him first and foremost about ALCA was "that I was a young contractor at the time, and I was rubbing shoulders with some astute contractors from all over the country. I stood to learn a great deal from them."

Ultimately, he said. "I learned from them that landscape contracting is a business as worthwhile as any contracting business; it is not second rate. I thought I was a little pimple in the pond, but people looked to me, too."

Ron Kujawa joined ALCA in 1972 because "we felt it was in our best



interest to join a national group. Because there was a free exchange of ideas. Because you weren't sitting down with competitors and trying to outdo each other."

ALCA's founding fathers — a board of about 20 landscape professionals — had both good and bad ideas in the beginning, Leid said. Among the bad ideas, he said, were, first, that ALCA should limit competition and, second, ALCA should be a buying group. Actually, he said, "competition is the best thing for an astute company" and "we discovered that being a major buying group wasn't acceptable as a goal."

The group's good ideas, Leid said, centered on contactors' emphasis on listening to and learning from one another, as well as teaching the next generation that they were businesspeople first, artisans second, Leid said.

When ALCA merged with the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) about six years ago to form the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET), those educational ideals were not lost.

Today, PLANET has adapted to present day issues, but, as in older times, its leadership still strives to provide answers to its members and students who will shape the landscape industry of tomorrow.

Kurt Kluznik, who in 2005 was ALCA's final president before it merged with PLCAA to form PLANET, is now a PLANET board member and has

served as a PLANET Trailblazer for three years. He and other Trailblazers mentor students and other industry newcomers.

"These students are going to hit the deck running. They're going to hit it in fourth gear," he said. "The rate of innovation in the industry will continue to accelerate based on these young people's enthusiasm and technological knowledge."

In his 40 years in the business, Kluznik's seen lots of change in the industry's national organizations. PLANET experienced growing pains at first, Kluznik said, but by now it has matured and established a firm identity.

Combining the networking-savvy ALCA and the government affairs-savvy PLCAA "created a more powerful, influential group" in PLANET, he said.

With the merger, ALCA and PLCAA morphed from medium-sized businesses "with strained resources," Kluznik said, "to a much larger business with much larger resources."

PLANET provides valuable strategic insights into what is happening in the landscape marketplace, and therefore has immersed itself in major issues such as sustainability, immigration, water use and more, Kluznik said.

"Our industry was green before the term 'green' was even coined," he said. "Now 'green' has taken on a whole new meaning.... The environment — both figuratively and literally — has changed dramatically in the last 10 years."

As for the industry's national organizations, perhaps Kujawa said it best: "Belonging to ALCA and subsequently to PLANET has had a profound impact upon my personal and professional growth. I think the most important thing I've ever learned in life is to know what I didn't know." As a result of sharing ideas with others in national organizations, he said, "I was able to find out things from people who did know."



An industry-changing property?

Meet Mark Baker and Nonnie Chrystal. What they're doing could change our industry. If it doesn't, it won't be from lack of effort on their part.

Husband, wife and business partners, they built and live in the Florida Showcase Green Enviro-home (FSGE) in Indialantic, FL. FOX News called the two-story, 3,292-sq.-ft. structure the "greenest house in the world."

Hyperbole or not, the FSGE is a rock star "green" house. *USA Today*, *Florida Today*, and dozens of other newspapers and magazines, both consumer and trade, have reported on it. Hardly a day goes by that Nonnie doesn't field requests for tours or interviews.

We met Mark and Nonnie this spring at a regional conference of the American Society

of Irrigation Consultants in Orlando. Their shared vision of a sustainable home and landscape is stunning. They describe their home as being "near" zero-loss, zero-energy, zero-maintenance and zero-runoff. To date, the data supports their claims. The home meets or exceeds 12 green building certifications, including LEED Platinum.

One of the components allowing it to earn green building accolades, of course, is its landscape.

The performance of the ornamentals and turf, like almost every feature of FSGE, has been excruciatingly monitored almost since Mark, an experienced builder and president of Mark Baker LLC, laid the first footer on the quarter-acre property in June 2007.

Native plants, only those that were in the region to greet Ponce DeLeon when he stepped ashore in April 1513, beautify the property, says Nonnie. Now well established, they require no irrigation and incredibly small amounts of maintenance.

The same goes for the small areas of paspalum and sunshine mimosa turfgrass on the property.

The landscape's most notable feature is 869 sq. ft. of green roof plantings; the great majority of plant material is on the house. There's also a small green roof on the pool outbuilding. The green roof on the house is irrigated from captured rainwater from the house.

Three, underground, 1,728-gal. cisterns capture runoff from the home's green roof areas. Special gutters on the home filter the rainwater before it enters the cisterns. The cisterns are daisy-chained so that the water level remains the same in all three. A low-energy, frequency-driven pump returns the water to the green roof for irrigation. Graywater from the shower, bathroom sinks and clothes washers is double filtered and ozonated before it's used to flush toilets in the house.

Most striking of all is how well the site contains stormwater runoff, in part because of a 100-sq.-ft. bioswale. The only measurable runoff from FSGE occurred in Aug. 2008 when Tropical Storm Fay dumped 25.5 in. of rain. This was before pervious Flexi-Pave made from recycled tires replaced pavement surfaces. Otherwise, the property has contained all the stormwater it has received, says Nonnie.

While water conservation is vital, in the long run, by itself, it won't be nearly enough to sustain Florida or its growth, says Nonnie. This will require a much better understanding of how to recycle water; capture, purify and store runoff; and recharge the state's aquifers.

She says the home she and Mark built, and which is being studied and monitored by the University of Central Florida, is providing proof this can be done without the need for massive new infrastructure. Eventually, governmental agencies will realize this and implement policies to make it happen at the homeowner level, she says.

Once that happens the implications for the landscape industry should be obvious.



Nonnie Chrystal and Mark Baker



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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.

What affluent prospects buy

Not so long ago I spent some valuable time with the purchaser of a \$1 million landscape. I was seeking a better understanding of what an affluent prospect thinks when considering a purchase. The purchaser graciously provided some great insights on selling to clients like himself.

As we walked together through the yard and his 15,000-sq.-ft. home, he tried to convince me that he was just a regular guy, like the rest of us. But of course he wasn't. He could easily afford a \$1 million landscape. But it became clear that what he wouldn't tolerate was, of all things, unpleasantness.

Value vs. price

It didn't take long to realize that a customer who spends \$100,000 on a landscape does not buy the same as one spending \$10,000. These two clients live in different universes. They approach buying decisions with different mindsets.

In the May 2011 issue of *Landscape Management*, my column, "Selling small jobs", offered a process for selling smaller jobs. Price and speed are critical for these sales. Price and speed are important, but not as much for well-to-do prospects.

Almost certainly, most rich prospects will try to get the best price they can. They're used to negotiating and most are pretty good at it. That's one of the reasons they have money. But, typically, they'll spend what's necessary to get what they want. Pushing your price button is their way of testing you. Your experience. Your confidence.

The rich person's biggest annoyance is the **construction mistakes** that **create havoc** on their properties.

They want competence

That's because, in the end, it's competence they seek, and usually not the lowest price. That's why, instead of giving them price concessions, the skilled salesperson gives them reasons to buy based on value. The salesperson emphasizes his or her firm's design and installation experience/expertise and what that means in terms of the entire project.

Most high-income customers want value and hate surprises and slip-ups. Highest on the surprise list are cost overruns. Customers associate shocking unplanned expenses with incompetence. Most view incompetence as unacceptable. When they've been promised competence, that's exactly what they expect.

Surprises most often result from weak designs that don't anticipate problems inherent in any construction job. Strong designs anticipate and precisely incorporate common problems into the price.

But the rich client's biggest annoyance (unpleasantness) is the construction mistakes that create havoc on their properties. The causes of 90% of these mess-ups result from poor lead-time planning and project management. Most clients, affluent or otherwise, want you invisible and gone.

So what does that mean to your sales process?

Obviously, these clients want to hear about and need to be convinced of the ways your strong production management system eliminates these mistakes. They're looking for competence combined with confidence at point of sale.

Of course, you will have to talk price with the well-heeled prospect as you would with any potential client. But you might want to add language similar to what this successful salesperson used on a real-life prospect: "I suggest that you consider the stress a weak design and poor production process will cause you and your wife. I've seen it a hundred times. The real question here is not price, but the kind of experience and end result you want to have."

He made the sale.

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AT A GLANCE

COMPANY: Brad Johnson's LawnAmerica

FOUNDED: 1999

HEADQUARTERS: Tulsa, OK

TITLE: Founder and president

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY: 25

SERVICE AREA: Tulsa and surrounding area, Bartlesville, Grand Lake

INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT: Longtime member of PLCAA and PLANET

NUMBER OF LOCATIONS: Three

EMPLOYEES: 40

SERVICES: Fertilization, weed and insect control, aeration, seeding, Primo Maxx applications, soil testing, mole control, snow removal during the winter

PERSONAL HIGHLIGHTS/HOBBIES: Backpacking, being with family

FAMILY: Wife, Becky, children, Jake, Katie and Luke, and three grandchildren

After building and selling one successful lawn care company to TruGreen, then starting and building a second lawn care company, **Brad Johnson** took most of the 2010 season away from his business, Brad Johnson's LawnAmerica, to hike the Appalachian Trail. The experience taught him two things: 1) People are generous; and 2) His company did pretty darn well, even without him. Now he's writing a book about the experience.

Brad, we understand you hiked the Appalachian Trail in 2010, all 2,181 miles of it. Tell us how you did it. I hiked it in three segments. I started at Springer Mountain in Georgia on May 28. That's kind of late. I got a late start and hiked more than 800 miles to central Virginia. Then I came home for a while and later in the summer hiked from Maine south for about 1,000 miles. This past December I finished the remaining 175 miles to Harpers Ferry (WV). Because I did the entire trail it's considered a thru-hike.

Why did you hike it? After I got a letter from TruGreen offering to buy my company, it started me thinking about what I would like to do if I could walk away from this business and do exactly what I wanted to do — hike the Appalachian Trail. Over a 3-month period I read books about the trail, talked to people who had done it, either all of it or some of it. And I decided I was going to do it and do it for charity.

Which charities? There are five: The Little Light House, Folds of Honor,

Young Life-Rogers, Habitat for Humanity and the Salvation Army. We put the hike out there. We publicized it. We called it AT2010 A Compassionate Journey. We developed a logo for it. We put it on our website and our guys even wore shirts last year that had the logo and sponsors on it. All American matched donations dollar for dollar. In the end we raised more than \$105,000.

Everybody on the trail has a trail nickname, what was yours? The Compassionator.

What was the toughest thing about hiking the trail? It was very hard physically but the mental and emotional challenges are even greater. Mostly being away from my family, from my wife and from my business.

Did you have any physical problems or injuries in the mountains? I had to get a

cortisone injection for a bum hip to begin with. I had shin splints, got infected toes and got a spider bite on my face. It bit me on the cheek. With some medications the swelling on my face finally went down. I had to go to the doctor about four times while I was on the trail but nothing major, thankfully.

Did you ever consider quitting? If I had dropped off the Trail after two weeks I would have looked pretty stupid. I kind of painted myself into a corner and that was partly by design. I had to finish this because so many people knew about it. You almost have to have a reason to hike the Trail and I had a reason. There were a couple of times when I hit the wall and got a little discouraged. It wasn't that I didn't think I could make it because I knew I could, but things happen.

Has the hike changed you?

The experience has made me appreciate relationships even more. My family. My friends. My employees. My customers. That's what you miss most, the relationships.

THE EXPERIENCE HAS MADE ME APPRECIATE
RELATIONSHIPS EVEN MORE. **MY FAMILY. MY FRIENDS.
MY EMPLOYEES. MY CUSTOMERS.**



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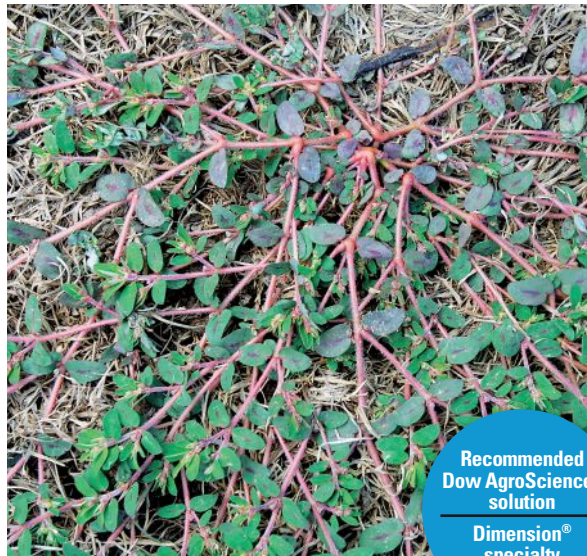
IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This annual emerges a few weeks after crabgrass, and continues well into the summer.
- ▶ The coarse, bunch-type grass features dark green leaves that form a basal rosette of prostrate to upright flattened stems.
- ▶ Compressed stems near the base are silver or white in color.
- ▶ Flowers contain two to 10 flattened, finger-like spikes that resemble a zipper.
- ▶ The strong, extensive root system invades high-

traffic areas like athletic fields or golf courses.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Improving turfgrass health and vigor through proper fertilization and maintenance is most advantageous.
- ▶ If possible, alleviate compaction and minimize traffic. For complete control, apply a pre-emergent herbicide such as dithiopyr just prior to crabgrass germination. This timing will provide season-long control of both crabgrass and goosegrass.



SPURGE

Euphorbia spp. (pictured: *E. maculata*)

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ Red- or purple-tinged stems and opposite leaves are common. All species emit milky sap when broken.
- ▶ Oblong leaves are smooth or sparsely hairy, reddish green to dark green in color — often with a maroon or purple spot in the center.
- ▶ The prostrate structure forms mats by branching from the base.
- ▶ This warm-season annual is found in disturbed soil, such as gardens and flower beds, along

sidewalks, and in open turf areas.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Spurge plants are prolific seed producers. Apply a spring treatment of a pre-emergent herbicide that offers residual broadleaf weed control, such as dithiopyr.
- ▶ Spurge germination is prominent in compacted soils, so alleviating compaction, or the reasons behind compaction (such as poor drainage or nematode infestations) will help keep spurge infestations from occurring.

* State restrictions on the sale and use of Dimension specialty herbicide products apply. Consult the label before purchase or use for full details.

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P R O V E N S O L U T I O N S

CLEAN CUT

Green Industry professionals are turning to propane equipment — and not looking back.

BY BRIAN RICHESSON



Jon Dozier was a tough sell the first time through the propane lawn equipment displays at the GIE+Expo in Louisville, KY.

“I don’t know if I wasn’t looking at it right, if I couldn’t make heads or tails of it, or if I didn’t think the savings were there,” the Georgia landscaper recalls of the propane lawn mowers he glanced over several years back at the trade show before going on his way.

To that point, Dozier’s only knowledge of propane was its role in cooking steaks on the grill. So how could he take the fuel seriously and rely on it to power his Merry Acres Landscape & Lawn Maintenance mowing equipment?

His attitude changed last year

during an opportunistic visit from a local propane marketer that turned Dozier’s business upside down. Russell Lemon, a representative from Modern Gas in Albany, GA, had been pitching Dozier on the benefits of propane lawn equipment. And on this particular visit to Dozier’s Albany office, the timing couldn’t have been better.

“It happened to be the right time that we were ready to buy equipment,” says Dozier, who last June replaced his gasoline fleet with eight Gravely 60-in. zero-turn riding mowers. On top of that, the company purchased a Ford F-150 propane pickup truck.

“You have to put yourself out there and make yourself available to these guys, and when they say ‘no,’ it’s not final,” Lemon says of the propane marketers’



Clockwise from top: Propane mowers are increasingly popular with maintenance contractors. Engines on propane mowers tend to require less frequent maintenance. Merry Acres Landscape & Lawn Maintenance co-owners Jarrett Martin, left, and Jon Dozier will burn 10,000 to 12,000 gallons of propane this year running eight Gravely mowers and a Ford F-150 pickup truck.

influence on landscapers. “You have to provide them with whatever they need.”

Landscape companies around the country have been making the same discoveries as Dozier and Merry Acres co-owner Jarrett Martin: Propane can power their equipment just as well as — or better than — gasoline.

Merry's time

Merry Acres runs its equipment year-round, with Dozier estimating the firm

will burn 10,000 to 12,000 gallons of propane annually. Modern Gas installed a 1,000-gal. fueling station at Merry Acres' facility, and the companies negotiated a 12-month price on propane. At less than \$2 a gallon, that supply contract enables Merry Acres to see significant fuel savings compared to the price of gasoline.

“We've always tried to be good stewards of the environment, but what got us looking into this area was a way to save money and increase our bottom line,” Dozier says. “It is an initial upfront expense to go propane. The trucks cost more, and the mowers cost more. But we're thinking we will recoup our cost in the first year-and-a-half.”

Initially, Dozier was hesitant about the propane lawn products, wondering whether they would hold the same power and performance as those running on gasoline. But the company

has been pleased with the results, even noticing an increase in power on the propane mowers.

“We put them in some nasty situations, cleaning up a restaurant that's been shut down for a while, and they blew right through that stuff,” Dozier says. “We never heard a strain on the mower, versus gasoline where the engine would bog down or slow up.”

Maintenance is also made easier on the propane mowers, as Merry Acres can double the amount of hours (now 100) between oil changes, “so our costs of maintaining it are down on our engine side,” Dozier says.

The company's Ford F-150 is used daily by its maintenance manager to check on accounts, but Dozier remains curious how fuel mileage would fare when a propane truck is worked harder, with a trailer and a heavy load of equipment.

In March, Merry Acres purchased four conversion kits from AltFuel LLC and has been testing other lawn equipment on propane. As the company needs more equipment, Dozier says it will continue to consider propane.

Staying competitive

No company has more experience using propane lawn equipment than Competitive Lawn Service in Downers Grove, Ill. It is said to be the first company in the country to operate its commercial crew — encompassing mowers, blowers, trimmers and trucks — entirely on propane.

Competitive Lawn Service runs a converted propane fleet of 18 mowers (12 Wright Standers and six Bob-Cat and Wright walk-behinds), 12 Dolmar blowers and six Lehr trimmers. The company also runs four propane-fueled Ford F-Series trucks with Roush retrofits, and a Ford dual-fuel truck from AJ Automotive Group.

“Every machine I have out there not running on propane is killing me,” says company founder Eric Hansen, who has put Competitive Lawn Service on



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the alternative fuel map with his push to propane, a process that began in 2008 when gasoline prices spiked. “I’d like to stop going to the gas station at all.”

With its converted equipment fleet, the company estimates it will burn about 25,000 gallons of propane this year, running mainly April through December. United Propane, a Heritage company, helped install a 1,000-gal. fueling station at Competitive Lawn Service for convenient, cost-efficient and secure fill-ups. About 40% of that propane goes into the company’s trucks.

“They’re like rocket ships; they’re extremely fast,” Hansen says of the trucks, which travel a small radius to customer sites, less than 10 miles from the office.

With a significant differential in per-gallon fuel costs between propane and gasoline, Competitive Lawn Service is saving about \$2,500 per month. And Hansen is seeing other benefits with propane. With slight adjustments, his first converted propane mower has reached 3,500 hours in runtime, when they normally “blow up at 2,500 hours,” he says.

“What we’re finding is these engines last longer. Do they last twice as long? We haven’t proven that yet, but they are lasting longer and we’re changing the oil every 100 hours as opposed to 25 hours,” Hansen says. “If we get an engine that

Baker Commercial Landscaping, Orlando, FL, converted 38 John Deere mowers to propane last year.

lasts longer, has less emissions, that runs the same, with the same cutting, that’s how we’re picking up all that savings.”

Hansen is a self-described “small-engine guy,” always looking for ways to gain longer runtimes and advantages from his equipment. Propane, he says, is helping him to achieve his goals — and allows Competitive Lawn Service to differentiate itself in the market.

Propane perspectives

When Baker Commercial Landscaping pulled one of its converted propane mowers, in operation for the previous five months, into the garage for an oil change, it made a notable discovery.

“When we drained the oil, it came out as clear as new. It was almost crystal clear,” says Bob Jensen, sales manager for the Orlando, FL-based company. “When we pulled the spark plugs, we found next to nothing on them. Maintenance-wise, this has been a huge benefit. It’s a clean-burning way to do business, and it saves us money and time.”

With help from Heritage Propane, Baker converted 38 of its John Deere mowers — 60- and 72-in. ride-ons and 48-in. walk-behinds — to propane last year.

continued on page 31



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continued from page 28

For Baker, no more time is wasted at the gas station, pulling the lawn equipment off the trailers for refueling. The price “at the pump” is also a welcome change, as the company saves about \$1.50 per gallon with propane compared to gasoline. Heritage refuels all of Baker’s cylinders on-site, with the company estimating that it burns more than 300 gallons of propane a week.

Moreover, propane provides a 6.5% better fuel burn than gasoline, and its clean-burning qualities reduce engine repairs by about 30%, while keeping many of its commercial customers satisfied during business hours, Baker President Marc Blum says. The company also notices a better response to the firing system with propane, as the walk-behinds are easier to start than the gasoline models.

“We have no regrets. We’re not going back [to gasoline]; we’re never going to consider it,” Jensen adds.

Shannon Wilson might not, either.

Competitive Lawn Service, Downers Grove, IL, converted 18 mowers including 12 Wright Standers, to propane.

He says he was “like a deer in headlights” when a representative from Metro Lift Propane, a division of Heritage, approached his landscape company, Greenscape Services in Sarasota, FL, about using propane in his equipment. That was about two years ago. The price of gasoline was a primary driver in the company adding four 61-in. zero-turn propane riding mowers to his 12-mower fleet.

“It’s ridiculous. It’s pushing almost four bucks a gallon,” Wilson says of gasoline prices. “It makes it really tough. You have to pass that on, but it doesn’t make the customers very happy, either. With propane, you can get a price locked in and it doesn’t fluctuate.”

Metro Lift supplies Greenscape’s propane through tank exchanges, with Wilson estimating a near 30% savings in fuel costs with the propane mowers. He says he hasn’t found any negatives with the units, noting the longevity of their clean-burning engines and fewer oil changes (once every eight months instead of three).

Wilson says he will continue to transition to propane mowers, with an



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*Based on 2011 U.S. Rain Bird® and Hunter® List Pricing effective January 1, 2011.

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ALTERNATIVE FUEL

Propane isn't just for mowers. This Lehr leaf blower is powered by a 1-pound refillable propane canister.



eye toward adding propane vehicles and his own refueling station as well.

Cleaning up

Billy Leavell is encouraging his colleagues to help clean the industry through propane partnerships. Nashville, TN-based Turf Managers LLC, which Leavell co-owns with Nathan Brandon, is running five of its 12 Exmark and Ferris 52- to 62-in. walk-behind lawn mowers on propane, servicing about 900 mostly residential customers 10 months out of the year.

The company first converted two mowers in 2008 in response to high gasoline prices, and has continually added propane to its new equipment in stages — with plans to convert them all to propane.

“We were and still are concentrating on environmentally friendly practices, and this is just a natural step for us to be more environmentally responsible, and at the same time it does have its economical advantages to us,” says Leavell, crediting the guidance and support of Jim Coker at Heritage Propane.

Turf Managers, which receives its propane supply in tank exchanges from Heritage's Metro Lift division, saves about \$1.05 per gallon with propane. The company is able to pay off the \$1,000 to \$1,200 per-mower conversion cost in about one year, Leavell says. But there are other benefits as well, particularly with the clean qualities of propane.

“You don't have to worry about filling up out of gasoline cans and the trash that gets in the gas tank and goes through the engine. The engines are much cleaner in that regard,” says Leavell, adding that the engines run and sound similar to gasoline.

“I didn't meet a gas can that didn't have a leaky nozzle; these cylinders attach just like a gas grill and you're good to go,” he says. *L.M.*

Brian Richesson is senior editor of Landscape Management's sister publication LP Gas.

RESOURCES

According to the Propane Education & Research Council (PERC), there are 150,000 to 200,000 new commercial mowers sold each year, and the OEMs are making efforts to grow propane's share to 15% by 2015. That could translate to more than 150 million gallons of propane sales each year.

PERC's Marketer Technology Training Program educates propane marketers on opportunities in commercial mowing, among other applications. Visit www.propanecouncil.org/MTT.

Propane lawn equipment manufacturers include:

- › Bad Boy
- › Bob-Cat
- › Cub Cadet
- › Dixie Chopper
- › Exmark
- › Ferris
- › Gravely
- › Husqvarna
- › Lehr
- › Scag
- › Snapper Pro

Brian Feehan, vice president of engine fuel for PERC, says:

“Even though propane in commercial mowing was out there four years ago with two small OEMs [Envirogard and Dixie Chopper], and the adoption of larger OEMs points us in the right direction, this still needs to be viewed as an infant market — and it requires us to maintain our presence and get stronger in it.”

A SUPPLEMENT TO

Landscape
Management

150

LM

WHO
MADE
THE CUT

It was a year of triumph and turmoil. Look inside to see how your results compare to the Green Industry's heavy hitters.

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Seasonal Payment Plan Example

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Months	Regular Payments	Adjusted Seasonal Payments
November – March	\$243	\$85
April – October	\$243	\$355

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*Offer ends 08/02/2011. Subject to approved credit on John Deere Financial Installment Plan for commercial use. 10% down payment required. \$85 and \$355 monthly payments are based on \$8,500 amount financed for 36 months at 1.9% APR. Taxes, freight, setup, and delivery charges could increase monthly payment. Other special rates and terms may be available, including financing for personal use. Available at participating dealers.



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MANY OF YOU started your businesses with a truck, trailer, mower, hand tools and most importantly, a passion for creating, beautifying and maintaining outdoor spaces. From those humble beginnings, you have grown into the trusted brands you represent in the markets you serve today.

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Over the years, we have all faced business challenges and refined our businesses. By moving and molding with the times, we have been allotted the privilege to take advantage of new opportunities while building and growing our people and brand along the way. The LM150 survey proves, with a showing of over 96,000 full and part time employees, that despite a down economy, the opportunity to flourish still exists.

The recent economic environment has, undoubtedly, been challenging on businesses. Many who've been in the industry for more than 20 years claim it's been the toughest time they've encountered. If these challenging economic times have taught us anything, it's to remember our simple beginnings — the drive and focus that inspired you to follow your entrepreneurial spirits and soar.

As I talk with lawn care and landscape professionals across the country, I hear optimism and focus. And it's inspiring and contagious. Instead of



KENTAYLOR, CLP

succumbing to flat growth, many are taking these lumps and renovating their businesses, implementing lean principles and, yes, even growing in the more complicated business environment we work in today. Proof of this optimism can be seen in the LM150 survey, which shows that the combined revenue in 2010 increased by 3.5 percent.

Today's economic reality calls for new and innovative approaches and John Deere is dedicated to providing the support and solutions necessary to achieve these successes. Our commitment to your business does not stop with providing innovative products and solutions. Our experienced John Deere dealer network is there to support your business needs, after the sale, with the most extensive factory trained service technicians and knowledgeable parts staff in the industry. We have one priority: To ensure product uptime in the most responsive manner, because we understand downtime is not an option when you are running a business.

At John Deere, we appreciate what you do every day to enhance the land we live, work and play on. We hope the work we do in 2012 and beyond will move us closer toward becoming your most trusted supplier on the job site. We look forward to seeing you soon, whether at an industry event, or a John Deere location.

Ken Taylor, CLP

General Sales Manager-

Commercial Business Development

WHO MADE THE CUT

It was a traumatic year for Green Industry companies. Some thrived, while others struggled to maintain even last year's losses. *LM* unveils its exclusive list of the 150 largest landscape contractors in the country.

BY **DAN JACOBS** EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

IF the results of the past year were a classroom, well, let's just say not everybody aced the final exam. 2010 was the weed-out class, the one that makes students decide whether they really want to pursue the Green Industry as an option.

The students in this scenario are the business owners who, no matter how well they did, learned a great deal about the study of running a business.

Of course, there are always those students who pass every test, seem to complete every homework assignment with ease and managed to pull a 4.0 grade point average — which for the purposes of this analogy means double digit growth. (Yeah, we hated those guys, too.)

Of course, the quality of your business acumen was by no means the sole factor in determining how well companies did ... or will do next year.

"We have identified only one obstacle for 2011," says Dennis Kaiser, senior manager of communications for ValleyCrest Cos., No. 3 on the *LM*150 list: "The economy."

But whether companies expanded or contracted, what earned professionals a passing grade in 2010 was surviving with the increased competition, along with less work and downward price

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LEGEND * 2009 data; ° 2010 estimated data;
 • Info from outside source; # Remaining revenue
 from retail garden center; NR = Not reported

	Company	Headquarters
1	TruGreen Lawncare and Landcare	Memphis, TN
2	ValleyCrest Landscape Cos.	Calabasas, CA
3	Brickman Group	Gaithersburg, MD
4	The Davey Tree Expert Co.	Kent, OH
5	ISS Grounds Control	Phoenix, AZ
6	Scotts Lawn Service	Marysville, OH
7	Bartlett Tree Experts	Stamford, CT
8	USM	Norristown, PA
9	Massey Services Inc.	Orlando, FL
10	Weed Man	Mississauga, Ontario, Canada
11	U.S. Lawns	Orlando, FL
12	Ambius	Buffalo Grove, IL
13	Lawn Doctor	Holmdel, NJ
14	Yellowstone Landscape Group	Plano, TX
15	Gothic Landscape Inc.	Valencia, CA
16	Ruppert Landscape	Laytonsville, MD
17	Vila & Son Landscaping Corp.	Miami, FL
18	Onesource Landscape & Golf Services	Tampa, FL
19	SavATree	Bedford Hills, NY
20	Clintar Landscape Management	Markham, Ontario, Canada
21	Marina Landscape Inc.	Anaheim, CA
22	Lipinski Outdoor Services	Marlton, NJ
23	Acres Group	Wauconda, IL
24	Jensen Corp.	San Jose, CA
25	Mainscape	Fishers, IN
26	NaturaLawn of America	Frederick, MD
27	Denison Landscaping Group	Fort Washington, MD
28	The Groundskeeper	Tucson, AZ
29	Mariani Landscape Management	Lake Bluff, IL
30	Fairco Inc.	Scottsdale, AZ
31	Nanak's Landscaping (Now Valleycrest)	Longwood, FL
32	Spring-Green Lawn Care Corp.	Plainfield, IL
33	Complete Landscaping Service	Bowie, MD
34	The Bruce Co of Wisconsin	Middleton, WI
35	Sierra Landscape Co.	Palm Desert, CA
36	Lucas Tree Expert Co.	Portland, ME
37	Chapel Valley Landscape Co.	Woodbine, MD
38	Cagwin & Dorward	Novato, CA
39	The Greenery Inc.	Hilton Head, SC
40	Mission Landscape Cos.	Tustin, CA
41	Terracare Associates	Littleton, CO
42	Gothic Grounds Management	Valencia, CA
43	James River Grounds Management	Glen Allen, VA
44	Landscape Concepts Management	Grayslake, IL
45	RCI	Slidell, LA
46	McFall Berry Landscape Management	McLean, VA
47	Chalet	Wilmette, IL
48	Shearon Environmental Design Co Inc.	Plymouth Meeting, PA
49	Scott Byron & Co Inc.	Lake Bluff, IL
50	AAA Landscape	Phoenix, AZ

2010 Revenue (U.S. Dollars)	% Rev Change From 2009	FT/PT Employees	% Employee Change From 2009	2010 Avg Rev Per Employee	% Avg Rev Per Employee Change From 2009	Comm/ Res/ Gov Mix
\$1,335,175,000	+1.8%	NR (12,000 total)	NA	\$111,265	NA	0/100/0
\$835,000,000	-10.9%	9000/0	-10%	\$92,778	-1%	100/0/0
\$807,508,000	+17.5%	10000/0	-0.5%	\$80,750	+18.2%	70/30/0
\$591,732,000	+5.3%	6723/281	+1.3%	\$84,485	+4%	0/100/0
\$380,474,000	NA	1800/6700	NA	\$44,761	NA	18/0/82
\$290,000,000	0%	1550/150	-15%	\$170,588	+17.6%	3/97/0
\$158,000,000	+5.3%	1350/25	+10.7%	\$114,909	-4.8%	16.80/4
\$133,305,900*	0%	1446/536	NR	NR	NR	100/0/0
\$129,011,218	NA	1191/0	0%	\$108,322	+9%	9/91/0
\$105,000,000	0%	750/2500	-4%	\$32,307	+5%	5/95/0
\$102,000,000	+8.5%	1650/0	+3%	\$61,818	+5.2%	100/0/0
\$96,277,345	-21.7%	NR	NR	NR	NR	99/1/0
\$83,000,000	+3.8%	40/4	+1%	NR	NR	1,99/0
\$74,000,000	-7.7%	1180/0	+18%	\$62,712	-21.6%	69/7/24
\$68,500,000	+0.3%	960/0	+3.6%	\$71,354	-7.3%	85/5/10
\$65,338,681	+12.5%	600/0	0%	\$108,898	+12.5%	100/0/0
\$61,400,000*	0%	798/0	NR	NR	NR	99/1/0
\$60,000,000	0%	1000/0	0%	\$60,000	0%	100/0/0
\$55,098,000	+15.8%	440/60	+8.7%	\$110,196	+6.5%	15/85/0
\$46,200,000	+2.7%	175/400	0%	\$80,348	+2.7%	95/5/0
\$43,000,000	+2.4%	604/0	+19.6%	\$71,192	-14.4%	25/0/75
\$42,756,217	+16.2%	61/50	-7.5%	\$385,191	+25.6%	100/0/0
\$41,151,872	-6.7%	80/550	-15.4%	\$65,320	+10.3%	20/25/45
\$41,000,000	-0.2%	390/0	-6%	\$105,128	+4.5%	45/45/10
\$39,900,000	+22.4%	350/150	+22%	\$79,800	+3%	99/1/0
\$37,750,000	+6.3%	271/72	+22.5%	\$110,058	-13.2%	10/90/0
\$36,000,000	+3%	225/180	+42%	\$88,889	-27.6%	100/0/0
\$35,090,500	-3.5%	700/0	+16.7%	\$50,129	-16.5%	100/0/0
\$35,000,000*	0%	100/290	NR	NR	NR	10/90/0
\$35,000,000*	0%	NR(200 total)	+33.3%	\$175,000	+50%	NR
\$34,500,000*	0%	450/200	NR	NR	NR	100/0/0
\$34,215,000	-0.8%	250/50	NR	\$114,050	NR	10/90/0
\$32,650,000	NA	125/400	NR	NR	NR	90/5/5
\$32,126,000*	0%	183/330	NR	NR	NR	80/20/0
\$32,000,000*	0%	250/0	NR	NR	NR	90/10/0
\$31,600,000	+23.9%	400/0	NR	\$79,000	NR	85/10/5
\$29,000,000°	0%	210/130	0%	\$85,294	0%	60/40/0
\$27,464,594	+3.1%	350/50	+6.7%	\$68,661	-3.3%	85/15/0
\$25,200,000	-0.4%	340/60	0%	\$63,000	-4%	60/28/2*
\$25,000,000	-3.9%	470/0	-6%	\$53,191	+2.3%	100/0/0
\$24,500,000	-7.5%	225/150	-6.3%	\$65,333	-1.4%	100/0/0
\$23,777,961	+14.4%	490/0	+3.1%	\$48,526	+10.9%	90/5/5
\$23,721,283	+20%	475/4	+7.9%	\$49,523	+11.3%	100/0/0
\$23,656,000	-10.1%	90/250	-5.6%	\$69,576	-4.8%	95/5/0
\$23,560,000	+30.1%	120/300	+91.8%	\$56,095	-32.1%	98/2/0
\$23,400,000	0%	180/120	0%	\$78,000	0%	100/0/0
\$23,100,000	-2.2%	275/0	0%	\$84,000	-2.2%	5/95/0
\$22,701,518	+3.2%	300/0	-37.5%	\$75,672	+65.1%	60/30/10
\$22,600,000	-1.7%	73/159	-9.4%	\$97,414	+8.4%	6/94/0
\$22,500,000	-19.6%	427/0	0%	\$52,693	-19.6%	50/2/48

listing continued on next page

continued from page S4

pressure — to name just a few of the challenges.

What does the class of 2010 look like? If we use the *LM150* as a guide, the ideal landscape company services mostly commercial customers, has a small percentage of residential clients, dabbles in government work — and maybe, just for fun, operates a tiny retail garden center.

But while running the numbers keeps statisticians employed, trying to pin a single label on all Green Industry enterprises is a little like lumping everyone in the melting pot that makes up this country as American. Well, yes, we're all Americans, but that glosses over the differences in language, customs, culture and geography, to name just a few.

2010 COMBINED
REVENUE OF *LM150*
\$7,762,431,033

2009 COMBINED
REVENUE OF *LM150*
\$7,501,566,624



= an increase of 3.5%

Similarly, the variety of companies comprising the *LM150* is as varied as any United Nations meeting. But there's something, from the largest company on the list (TruGreen Lawncare and Landcare at \$1.335 billion) to the smallest (Lawn Dawg at \$6.83 million) that separates these from the rest: Size matters.

Big firm on campus

Whether it's buying power, setting a legislative agenda or serving as a role model (intentionally or otherwise) for the industry nationally or in the local community, the sheer mass of a company gives it machismo, swagger, gravitas.

In 2010, the *LM150* earned a total of \$7.762 billion. That's an increase of 3.5% over 2009, but not quite up to 2008's \$7.97 billion.

continued on page S8

	Company	Headquarters
51	Greenscape Inc.	East Taunton, MA
52	Maldonado Nursery & Landscaping Inc.	San Antonio, TX
53	Sebert Landscaping	Bartlett, IL
54	Christy Webber Landscapes	Chicago, IL
55	Environmental Management Services Inc.	Plain City, OH
56	DLC Resources Inc.	Phoenix, AZ
57	Russell Landscape Group Inc.	Dacula, GA
58	Moore Landscapes Inc.	Northbrook, IL
59	D Schumacher Landscaping	West Bridgewater, MA
60	David J Frank Landscape Contracting Inc.	Germantown, WI
61	Bemus Landscape Inc.	San Clemente, CA
62	Senske Lawn & Tree Care	Kennewick, WA
63	Cornerstone Solutions Group	Dade City, FL
	Heads Up Landscape Inc.	Albuquerque, NM
65	Creative Environments Design & Landscape Inc.	Tempe, AZ
66	Clean Scapes	Austin, TX
67	Urban Farmer Inc.	Thornton, CO
68	Lambert Landscape Company	Dallas, TX
69	Teufel Landscape Management	Portland, OR
	Girard Environmental	Sanford, FL
	The Highridge Corp.	Issaquah, WA
72	Ryan Lawn & Tree	Overland Park, KS
73	Gachina Landscape Management Inc.	Menlo Park, CA
74	Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care	Denver, CO
75	Landscape Specialists Inc.	Lake Forest, CA
76	Dobson's Woods & Water Inc.	Ocoee, FL
77	Metroplex Garden Design Landscaping LP	Dallas, TX
78	Dennis' 7 Dees Landscaping Inc.	Portland, OR
79	CoCal Landscape Management	Denver, CO
80	Dora Landscaping Co.	Apopka, FL
	The Dworsky Cos.	Gardena, CA
82	Gibbs Landscape Co.	Smyrna, GA
83	Nissho of California Inc.	Vista, CA
84	Clarence Davids & Co.	Matteson, IL
85	Naturescape	Muskego, IL
86	Meadows Farms Inc.	Chantilly, VA
	High Tech Landscapes Inc.	Branchburg, NJ
88	McHale Landscape Design Inc.	Upper Marlboro, MD
89	Countryside Industries Inc.	Wauconda, IL
90	Benchmark Landscape Management	Poway, CA
	Greenscapes of Southwest Florida	Naples, FL
92	Andre Landscape Service Inc.	Azusa, CA
93	Precision Landscape Management	Dallas, TX
94	PROscape	Orlando, FL
95	Complete Property Maintenance Inc.	Coconut Creek, FL
	Earthworks Inc.	Lillian, TX
97	Dixie Landscape Co Inc.	Miami, FL
98	Reliable Property Services	St. Paul, MN
	LMI Landscapes Inc.	Carrollton, TX
	Stay Green Inc.	Santa Clarita, CA

2010 Revenue (U.S. Dollars)	% Rev Change From 2009	FT/PT Employees	% Employee Change From 2009	2010 Avg Rev Per Employee	% Avg Rev Per Employee Change From 2009	Comm/ Res/ Gov Mix
\$22,184,000	-3.5%	225/0	+12.5%	\$98,596	-14.3%	50/50/0
\$21,000,000	-12.5%	300/25	+55.5%	\$64,615	-43.7%	77/12/11
\$21,000,000*	0%	50/300	NR	NR	NR	90/10/0
\$20,467,809*	0%	264/0	NR	NR	NR	70/30/0
\$20,400,000	+10.3%	130/180	+10.7%	\$65,806	-4%	80/5/15
\$20,372,200	-9%	348/2	+6%	\$58,206	-14.2%	100/0/0
\$20,010,000	+12.7%	275/120	-31.3%	\$50,658	+64.1%	90/5/5
\$20,000,000*	+11.1%	250/0	0%	\$80,000	+11.1%	100/0/0
\$19,950,000*	0%	160/0	NR	NR	NR	60/40/0
\$19,800,000	0%	260/18	+9%	\$71,223	-8.3%	70/30/0
\$19,300,000	-5.7%	340/0	-2.9%	\$56,765	-2.9%	94/3/3
\$19,000,000	+2.7%	200/70	+8%	\$70,370	-4.9%	25/70/5
\$18,500,000	-21.3%	325/35	+51.9%	\$51,389	-48.2%	75/25/0
\$18,500,000	+5.1%	220/100	+36.2%	\$57,813	-22.8%	85/10/5
\$18,300,000*	0%	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR
\$18,226,000	NA	200/25	NR	\$81,004	NR	100/0/0
\$18,000,000	-.04%	110/150	-13.3%	\$69,231	+14.9%	75/25/0
\$17,850,000	-.08%	165/5	+6.3%	\$105,000	-3.7%	5/95/0
\$17,500,000	-34%	190/70	-19.6%	\$67,308	-18%	86/14/0
\$17,500,000	-12.5%	240/120	+12.5%	\$48,611	-22.2%	100/0/0
\$17,500,000	+25%	NR (750 total)	NR	\$23,333	NR	NR
\$17,362,000	+18.5%	160/3	-37.3%	\$106,515	+89%	80/20/0
\$17,151,943	+3.7%	251/3	-2%	\$67,527	+5.8%	90/10/0
\$17,004,427	+8.9%	197/3	+3.6%	\$85,022	+5.1%	33/66/1
\$17,000,000*	0%	300/0	NR	NR	NR	100/0/0
\$16,800,000*	0%	NR	NR	NR	NR	NR
\$16,600,000	-27.2%	28/1	0%	\$572,414	-27.8%	65/35/0
\$16,557,661	-10.5%	230/43	+8.8%	\$60,651	-27.7%	25/33/9*
\$16,250,000*	0%	120/150	NR	NR	NR	100/0/0
\$16,000,000*	0%	80/0	NR	NR	NR	90/10/0
\$16,000,000	+6.7%	NR (350 total)	NR	\$45,714	NR	NR
\$15,950,096	NR	275/0	NR	\$58,000	NR	61/39/0
\$15,700,000*	0%	260/0	NR	NR	NR	20/80/0
\$15,625,000	-13.2%	250/0	-9.1%	\$62,500	-4.5%	90/5/5
\$15,602,612	+12.8%	164/8	+4.9%	\$90,713	+7.6%	10/90/0
\$15,000,000	+7.1%	100/125	-33.8%	\$66,667	+61.9%	2/98/0
\$15,000,000	NA	25/250	NR	\$54,545	NR	75/0/25
\$14,600,000	0%	140/0	-6.7%	\$104,285	+7.1%	0/100/0
\$14,500,000	-24%	47/122	-25.9%	\$85,799	+2.6%	80/20/0
\$14,200,500	-12.4%	225/3	+11.8%	\$62,283	-21.6%	70/20/10
\$14,200,000	+0.7%	212/0	0%	\$66,981	+0.7%	100/0/0
\$14,191,846*	0%	260/0	0%	\$54,584	0%	85/15/0
\$14,000,000	+3.7%	250 peak season	-40%	\$56,000	+71.7%	NR
\$13,650,000	+21.9%	260/60	+18.5%	\$42,656	+2.8%	95/4/1
\$13,500,000	-3.6%	275/40	0%	\$42,857	-3.6%	90/10/0
\$13,500,000	+32.4%	150/125	+27.9%	\$36,000	-24.1%	100/0/0
\$13,255,000	-15.8%	195/0	+34.5%	\$67,974	-37.4%	80/20/0
\$13,000,000	+8.8%	40/250	+26.1%	\$44,828	-13.7%	90/0/10
\$13,000,000	-13.9%	185/0	0%	\$70,270	-13.9%	100/0/0
\$13,000,000	+3.8%	210/0	+5%	\$61,905	-1.1%	95/1/4

listing continued on next page

continued from page S6

Revenue changes were all over the place. Some companies saw huge leaps in revenue, while others were hit hard. Many adjusted by reducing staff or cutting back in other ways.

And don't forget the regulatory challenges continuing to force owners to adapt.

Others looked and continue to look for new ways to grow.

"The biggest client growth opportunity will be from large portfolio retail properties," says Kaiser. "These clients have numerous small sites spread over a large geographic area.

"The second area of growth is geographic," Kaiser continues. "Our goal is to grow within our current footprint by adding multi-site clients."

Making the grade

There certainly is some optimism. While the housing market for the most part remains in shambles, there is a light at the end of the tunnel for some contractors.

"The biggest opportunity is in former customers we and our competitors lost due to the struggling economy in recent years, in both residential and commercial markets," says Barry Matthews, COO of Spring-Green Lawn Care Corp. and No. 32 on this year's list.

For many, the hard work has been done. Staffs have been pared back; bidding has been adjusted for the downward pressure; in some cases, purchases have been delayed. Everyone is running leaner and more efficiently. Still, many executives are leery about 2012.

There are some signs of improvement, and silver linings being found: Even in the hardest-hit areas, there are opportunities.

"It's been an eye-opener for (owners)," says Bruce Wilson, LM columnist and partner at the Wilson-Oyler Group. "In spite of the fact prices are down, you can still make money."

And that, in the end, is what most of us went to school for. LM

TOTAL # OF PEOPLE
EMPLOYED BY TOP 150
COMPANIES IN 2010

96,206

TOTAL # OF OFFICES/
BRANCHES OF TOP 150
COMPANIES IN 2010

2,868

	Company	Headquarters
	ProGrass	Wilsonville, OR
102	RGS (Resident Group Services Inc.)	Anaheim, CA
	Raymow Enterprises Inc (now a ValleyCrest Co.)	Oldsmar, FL
104	Florida Landscape Service Inc.	Orlando, FL
105	Land-Tech Enterprises Inc.	Warrington, PA
106	New Way Landscape & Tree Services	San Diego, CA
107	Westco Grounds Maintenance Co Inc.	Houston, TX
	Hermes Landscaping Inc.	Lenexa, KS
	Sun City Landscapes Inc.	Las Vegas, NV
110	HighGrove Partners	Austell, GA
111	ArtisTree Landscape Maintenance & Design	Venice, FL
112	Perficut Companies Inc.	Des Moines, IA
113	Sposato Landscape Co Inc.	Milton, DE
114	Mickman Brothers Inc.	Ham Lake, MN
	Rosehill Gardens Inc.	Kansas City, MO
	BDG Maintenance, Berghoof Design Group	Scottsdale, AZ
117	Realty Landscaping Corp.	Newtown, PA
118	Arteka Cos.	Shakopee, MN
119	Mill Brothers Landscape Group	Fort Collins, CO
120	Houston Landscapes Unlimited	Sugar Land, TX
	Lied's Nursery Inc.	Sussex, WI
122	Basnight Land and Lawn	Chesapeake, VA
123	Gardeners' Guild Inc.	Richmond, CA
124	Designs By Sundown	Englewood, CO
125	Luke Brothers Landscape Services	Holiday, FL
	Parker Interior Plantscape Inc.	Scotch Plains, NJ
	Carson Landscape Industries	Sacramento, CA
128	Cleary Bros Landscape Inc.	Danville, CA
129	The Spencer Co.	Houston, TX
130	Angler Environmental	Richmond, VA
131	Kinsella Landscape Inc.	Blue Island, IL
132	American Landscape Systems Inc.	Lewisville, TX
133	Becker Landscape Contractors Inc.	Indianapolis, IN
134	Odyssey Landscape Management	Lodi, CA
135	Hoffman Landscapes Inc.	Wilton, CT
136	Oak Leaf Landscape Management	Anaheim, CA
137	Grant & Power Landscaping Inc.	West Chicago, IL
138	Schultz Industries Inc.	Golden, CO
139	Native Land Design LLC	Cedar Park, TX
140	John Mini Distinctive Landscapes	Congers, NY
141	Carol King Landscape Maintenance Inc.	Orlando, FL
142	Webb Landscape Inc.	Ketchum, ID
143	Tree Tech Inc.	Foxboro, MA
	Blondie's Treehouse Inc.	Mamaroneck, NY
145	The Celtis Group	San Jose, CA
146	Kujawa Enterprises Inc.	Oakcreek, WI
147	Peabody Landscape Group	Columbus, OH
148	Pacheco Brothers Gardening	Hayward, CA
149	Executive Landscape Inc.	Fallbrook, CA
150	Lawn Dawg Inc.	Nashua, NH

2010 Revenue (U.S. Dollars)	% Rev Change From 2009	FT/PT Employees	% Employee Change From 2009	2010 Avg Rev Per Employee	% Avg Rev Per Employee Change From 2009	Comm/ Res/ Gov Mix
\$13,000,000	+8.3%	175/0	0%	\$74,286	+8.3%	70/30/0
\$12,500,000	+0.8%	185/0	+8.8%	\$67,568	-7.4%	85/10/5
\$12,500,000*	0%	275/0	0%	\$45,455	NR	90/10/0
\$12,280,000*	0%	60/0	0%	\$204,667	0%	NR
\$12,200,000°	+10.4%	245/135	0%	\$32,105	+4.5%	95/5/0
\$12,131,000	+8.3%	180/0	-10%	\$67,394	+20.3%	70/30/0
\$12,000,000	0%	150/10	+10.3%	\$75,000	-9.4%	100/0/0
\$12,000,000	-7.7%	120/60	-5.3%	\$66,667	-2.6%	60/35/5
\$12,000,000*	0%	147/0	0%	\$81,633	0%	NR
\$11,944,000	+18.3%	94/3	-15.7%	\$123,134	+40.2%	95/3/2
\$11,930,000	-3%	165/50	-28.3%	\$55,488	+35.3%	80/20/0
\$11,800,000	+2.6%	45/75	+9%	\$98,333	-6%	85/15/0
\$11,700,000	+11.4%	150/55	+24%	\$57,073	-10.3%	70/30/0
\$11,500,000	+1.8%	80/10	-14.3%	\$127,777	+18.7%	50/40/10
\$11,500,000*	0%	150/30	0%	\$63,889	0%	60/40/0
\$11,500,000*	0%	140/1	0%	\$81,560	0%	70/30/0
\$11,000,000	+8.9%	65/75	0%	\$78,571	0%	70/30/0
\$10,929,718*	0%	100/5	0%	\$104,093	0%	80/20/0
\$10,818,658*	0%	140/0	0%	\$77,276	0%	80/20/0
\$10,750,000	-7.3%	NR 114 (total)	-8.8%	\$94,298	-1.7%	90/10/0
\$10,750,000*	0%	150/18	0%	\$63,988	0%	NR
\$10,500,000	+11.7%	100/67	+1.2%	\$62,874	+10.3%	70/25/5
\$10,325,000	+3.3%	145/0	+7.4%	\$71,207	-3.9%	80/15/5
\$10,000,000	+11.1%	90/0	-5.3%	\$111,111	+17.3%	5/95/0
\$10,000,000	-76.7%	230/45	-57.7%	\$36,364	-45%	80/0/20
\$10,000,000	+5.3%	99/6	-34.4%	\$95,238	+60.4%	95/0/0
\$10,000,000	0%	125/0	0%	\$80,000	0%	90/10/0
\$9,800,000	-10.1%	140/2	+12.7%	\$69,014	+3%	92/8/0
\$9,539,690	-13.8%	173/7	-4.3%	\$52,998	-9%	100/0/0
\$9,500,000	-14.6%	75/2	-11.5%	\$123,376	-3.5%	25/25/50
\$9,330,000	-20.7%	32/90	+7%	\$76,230	-26.2%	73/25/2
\$9,254,480	+6.4%	98/0	-3.1%	\$94,433	+10.7%	50/0/50
\$9,200,000	+2.2%	45/110	-3.1%	\$59,355	+5.5%	90/10/0
\$9,065,000*	0%	NR	NR	\$78,826	0%	NR
\$9,015,000	+21.8%	86/0	+14.7%	\$104,826	+6.2%	99/0/1
\$9,000,000*	0%	NR	NR	\$150,000	0%	NR
\$8,900,000	+20.3%	25/76	+21.7%	\$88,119	-1.2%	53/47/0
\$8,897,375	+16.7%	84/62	+52.1%	\$60,941	-23.3%	100/0/0
\$8,707,429	+14.2%	141/0	-4.1%	\$61,755	+19.1%	98/2/0
\$8,700,000	+3.6%	58/37	+3.3%	\$91,579	+3%	95/5/0
\$8,390,000	+2.3%	118/40	-5.4%	\$53,101	+8.1%	68/10/22
\$8,197,277	+6%	125/15	-15.2%	\$58,552	+18.5%	29/70/1
\$8,000,000*	0%	75/4	0%	\$101,266	0%	60/40/0
\$8,000,000*	0%	95/35	0%	\$61,538	0%	70/30/0
\$7,750,000*	0%	78/0	0%	\$99,359	0%	NR
\$7,724,223	-9.4%	75/50	-13.8%	\$61,794	+3.3%	90/2/8
\$7,600,000*	0%	45/75	0%	\$63,333	0%	70/30/0
\$7,200,000	NA	110/4	NR	\$63,157	NR	30/10/60
\$7,100,000	-8.6%	125/0	+4.2%	\$56,800	-12.2%	50/40/10
\$6,822,841	NA	68/6	NR	\$92,201	NR	4/96/0

BY REGION

(IN U.S. DOLLARS)



NORTHEAST

1	Brickman	\$282,627,800
2	Scotts Lawn Service	\$87,000,000
3	Bartlett Tree Experts	\$83,740,000
4	Lawn Doctor	\$56,440,000
5	SavATree	\$50,139,180
6	Ruppert Landscape	\$39,203,209
7	Denison Landscaping Group	\$36,000,000
8	Lipinski Outdoor Services	\$32,067,163
9	NaturaLawn of America	\$28,690,000
10	Shearon Environmental Design Co.	\$22,701,518
11	Greenscape	\$22,184,000
12	Complete Landscaping Service	\$21,222,500
13	D. Schumacher Landscaping	\$19,950,000*
14	Ambius	\$16,367,149
15	Chapel Valley Landscape Co.	\$14,500,000°
16	McFall and Berry Landscape Management	\$14,040,000
17	Land-Tech Enterprises	\$12,200,000°
18	Sposato Landscape Co.	\$11,700,000
19	Realty Landscaping Corp.	\$11,000,000
20	McHale Landscape Design	\$10,220,000
21	Hoffman Landscapes	\$9,015,000
22	John Mini Distinctive Landscapes	\$8,700,000
23	Parker Interior Plantscape	\$8,200,000
24	Tree Tech	\$8,000,000*
25	Blondie's Treehouse	\$7,200,000*

SOUTHWEST

1	Brickman	\$32,300,320
2	ISS Grounds Control	\$30,437,920
3	The Groundskeeper	\$29,826,925
4	Yellowstone Landscape Group	\$29,600,000
5	AAA Landscape	\$22,275,000
6	Maldonado Nursery & Landscaping	\$21,000,000
7	DLC Resources	\$20,372,200
8	Scotts Lawn Service	\$20,300,000
9	Heads Up Landscape	\$18,500,000
10	Clean Scapes	\$18,226,000
11	Lambert Landscape Co.	\$17,850,000
12	Metroplex Garden Design Landscaping	\$16,600,000
13	Precision Landscape Management	\$14,000,000
14	Earthworks Inc.	\$13,500,000
15	Ambius	\$12,516,055
16	Westco Grounds Maintenance Co.	\$12,000,000
17	LMI Landscapes	\$11,960,000
18	BDG Maintenance, Berghoff Design Group	\$11,500,000*
19	Houston Landscapes Unlimited	\$10,750,000
20	U.S. Lawns	\$10,200,000
21	The Spencer Co.	\$9,539,690
22	American Landscape Systems	\$9,254,480
23	Native Land Design	\$8,707,429
24	Bartlett Tree Experts	\$7,900,000
25	Gothic Grounds Management	\$7,608,947

WEST

1	Brickman	\$80,750,800
2	Gothic Landscape	\$48,635,000
3	Marina Landscape	\$43,000,000
4	Jensen Corp.	\$41,000,000
5	Sierra Landscape Co	\$32,000,000*
6	Cagwin & Dorward	\$27,464,594
7	Mission Landscape Cos.	\$25,000,000
8	Terracare Associates	\$24,500,000
9	Ambius	\$21,181,015
10	Bemus Landscape	\$19,300,000
11	Senske Lawn & Tree Care	\$19,000,000
12	Urban Farmer	\$18,000,000
13	Teufel Landscape	\$17,500,000
14	Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care	\$17,004,427
15	Landscape Specialists	\$17,000,000*
16	Dennis' 7 Dees Landscaping	\$16,557,661
17	CoCal Landscape	\$16,250,000*
18	Gothic Grounds Management	\$16,169,013
19	Nissho of California	\$15,700,000*
20	Benchmark Landscape	\$14,200,500
21	Andre Landscape Service	\$14,191,846*
22	Stay Green	\$13,000,000
	ProGrass	\$13,000,000
24	RGS	\$12,500,000
25	New Way Landscape & Tree Service	\$12,131,000

THE COMPETITIVE EDGE

We asked our *LM150* what separates them from the rest. Here's a sampling of the programs and systems that give them an edge over their competitors:

SOUTHEAST

1	Brickman	\$169,576,680
2	Massey Services	\$129,011,218
3	Scotts Lawn Service	\$87,000,000
4	Vila & Son Landscaping Corp.	\$61,400,000*
5	Yellowstone Landscape Group	\$44,400,000
6	Nanak's Landscaping	\$34,500,000*
7	Bartlett Tree Experts	\$26,860,000
8	Ruppert Landscape	\$26,135,472
9	The Greenery	\$25,200,000
10	James River Grounds Management	\$23,721,283
11	RCI	\$23,560,000
12	Mainscape	\$22,743,000
13	Russell Landscape Group	\$20,010,000
14	Lawn Doctor	\$19,920,000
15	Gothic Landscape	\$19,865,000
16	Cornerstone Solutions Group	\$18,500,000
17	Girard Environmental Services	\$17,500,000
18	Ambius	\$17,329,922
19	Dora Landscaping Co.	\$16,000,000*
20	Gibbs Landscape Co.	\$15,950,096
21	Chapel Valley Landscape Co	\$14,500,000°
22	Greenscapes of Southwest Florida	\$14,200,000
23	PROscape	\$13,650,000
24	Complete Property Maintenance	\$13,500,000
25	Dixie Landscape Co	\$13,255,000

MIDWEST

1	Brickman	\$242,252,400
2	Scotts Lawn Service	\$87,000,000
3	Acres Group	\$41,151,872
4	Mariani Landscape	\$35,000,000
5	The Bruce Co of Wisconsin	\$32,126,000
6	Ambius	\$27,920,430
7	Spring-Green Lawn Care Corp.	\$23,950,500
8	Landscape Concepts Management	\$23,656,000
9	Chalet	\$23,100,000
10	Scott Byron & Co.	\$22,148,000
11	Sebert Landscaping	\$21,000,000
12	Christy Webber Landscapes	\$20,467,809
13	Environmental Management Services	\$20,400,000
14	Moore Landscapes	\$20,000,000
15	David J Frank Landscape Contracting	\$19,800,000
16	Ryan Lawn & Tree	\$16,841,140
17	Clarence Davids & Co.	\$15,625,000
18	Naturescape	\$15,602,612
19	Countryside Industries	\$14,500,000
20	Mainscape	\$13,566,000
21	Reliable Property Services	\$13,000,000
22	Hermes Landscaping	\$12,000,000
23	Perficut Cos	\$11,800,000
24	Rosehill Gardens	\$11,500,000
25	Bartlett Tree Experts	\$11,060,000

Complete Landscaping — Bowie, MD

1. Complete Landscaping utilizes GPS systems for all multi-site routing. The systems allow for more efficient routing and cost-savings. Crews can be dispatched more quickly and efficiently to any site within our company portfolio.
2. Complete Landscaping recently invested in a new database for service and billing. This database tracks client services at the task level. Reporting and management oversight data have been greatly enhanced by the new system.

ISS Grounds Control — Phoenix, AZ

Aggressive marketing, value added services, present value driven business propositions

Gothic Landscape Inc. — Valencia, CA

1. Decentralize local management dedicated to that region
2. Commitment to our mission statement
3. Long-term planning sessions

Ruppert Landscape — Laytonsville, MD

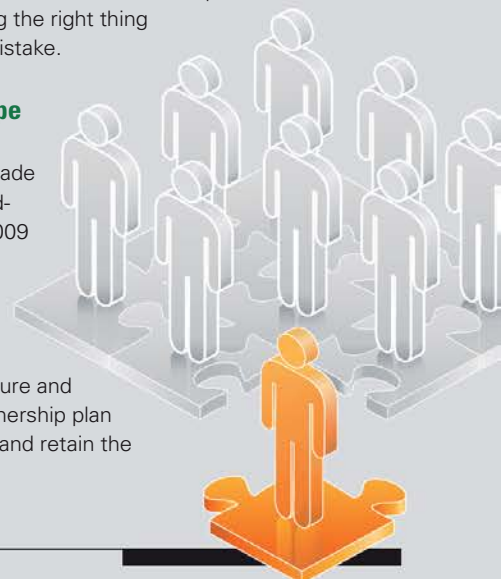
1. We have a strong charitable giving ethic and programs in place which help reinforce for employees that the work being performed has value that goes far beyond a day's work and a paycheck. As a result, employees are proud of the organization they work for.
2. We have a number of systems designed to recognize and appreciate our employees regularly — from hosting employee appreciation events and town hall meetings, to recognizing performance excellence and employee milestones.

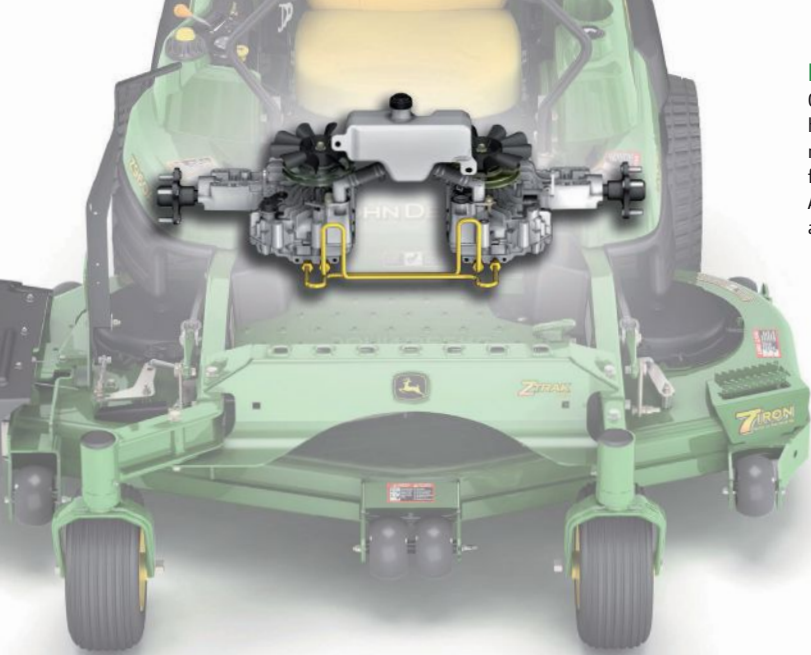
Earthworks Inc. — Lillian, TX

We don't have any magic bullets. We work hard and try to handle every situation with honesty, integrity and humility. We do everything possible to demonstrate true concern for our clients and their needs, and we don't put a price limit on doing the right thing when we make a mistake.

Mission Landscape Cos. — Irvine, CA

1. The investment made in software and hardware upgrades in 2009 are saving overhead costs and rapidly improving efficiencies.
2. Our company culture and employee stock ownership plan continues to attract and retain the best in the industry.





Exclusive Hydro Ground Transmission

Our unique cross-porting system routes the coolest hydraulic fluid to the hydraulic pump doing the most work. For long life, our transmissions also feature a piston pump and internal wet disk brakes. And for performance, gear reduction drives were added to enhance torque to the drive wheels.

Heavy Duty C-Channel Frame

The C-Channel frames on the Z900 are rock-solid, indestructible foundations. And a redistribution of weight, from front to rear, including a cast-iron bumper, makes side-hill mowing a breeze.

Our design philosophy?



7-Iron PRO Deck

The only deck in the industry stamped from a single sheet of thick, seven gauge steel using four million pounds of pressure. The result? Superior strength, excellent airflow, and an industry best blade tip speed of 18,000 feet per minute.

The ZTrak™ PRO 900 Series

When we sat down to design our zero-turn mowers, we had three goals in mind: make it easier to operate. Make it stronger. And make it more productive. The result is a machine that excels in all three areas, with features you won't find on any other mower. See your John Deere dealer for a Z900 demonstration and ask about our Work It For A Week Guarantee.

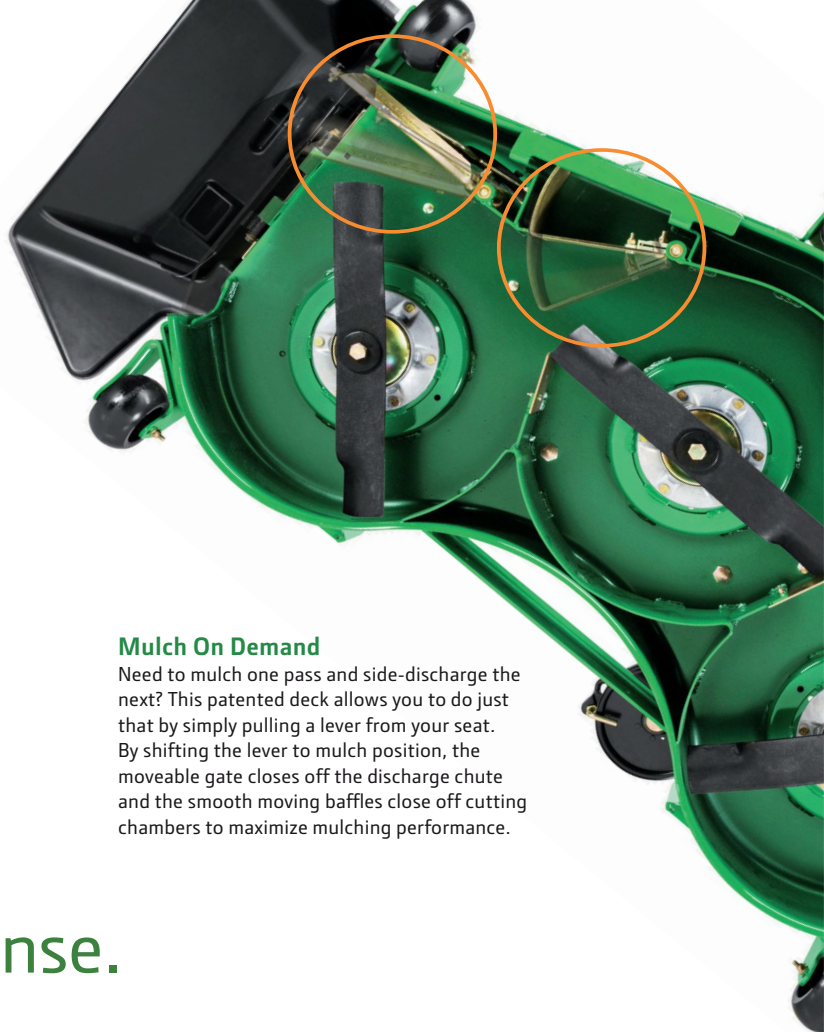
Accept Nothing Less





Height-of-cut Adjustment Dial

Our exclusive HOC dial allows you to set the cut height with just the twist of a dial. The simple mechanical design ensures superior performance and long life. A transport lock keeps the deck in place when loading and unloading. And the cut range is 1.5 to 5.0 inches at $\frac{1}{4}$ in. increments.



Mulch On Demand

Need to mulch one pass and side-discharge the next? This patented deck allows you to do just that by simply pulling a lever from your seat. By shifting the lever to mulch position, the moveable gate closes off the discharge chute and the smooth moving baffles close off cutting chambers to maximize mulching performance.

Common sense.



Comfort and Convenience Package

This industry exclusive features built-in electronic controls embedded in the levers that allow you to raise or lower the deck as well as disengage the mower blades, all with the push of a button. Also, these ergonomically angled control levers come with thick padded grips for less fatigue.

0% APR
FOR 24 MONTHS



JOHN DEERE

JohnDeere.com/MowPro

COMMERCIAL

1	ValleyCrest Landscape Cos.	\$835,000,000
2	Brickman	\$565,255,600
3	USM	\$133,305,900*
4	U.S Lawns	\$102,000,000
5	Ambius	\$95,314,572
6	ISS Grounds Control	\$68,485,320
7	Ruppert Landscape	\$65,338,681
8	Vila & Son Landscaping Corp.	\$60,786,000*
9	Onesource Landscape & Golf Services	\$60,000,000
10	Gothic Landscape Inc.	\$58,225,000
11	Yellowstone Landscape Group	\$51,060,000
12	Clintar Landscape Management	\$43,890,000
13	Lipinski Outdoor Services	\$42,756,217
14	Mainscape	\$39,501,000
15	Denison Landscaping Group	\$36,000,000
16	The Groundskeeper	\$35,090,500
17	Nanak's Landscaping	\$34,500,000*
18	Complete Landscaping Service	\$29,385,000
19	Sierra Landscape Co	\$28,800,000*
20	Lucas Tree Expert Co.	\$26,860,000
21	The Bruce Co of Wisconsin	\$25,700,800*
22	Bartlett Tree Experts	\$25,280,000
23	Mission Landscape Cos.	\$25,000,000
24	Terracare Associates	\$24,500,000
25	James River Grounds Management	\$23,721,283

RESIDENTIAL

1	The Davey Tree Expert Co.	\$591,732,000
2	Scotts Lawn Service	\$281,300,000
3	Brickman	\$242,252,400
4	Bartlett Tree Experts	\$126,400,000
5	Massey Services Inc.	\$117,400,208
6	Weed Man	\$99,750,000
7	Lawn Doctor	\$82,170,000
8	SavATree	\$46,833,300
9	NaturaLawn of American Business Media	\$33,975,000
10	Mariani Landscape Management	\$31,500,000*
11	Spring-Green Lawn Care Corp.	\$30,793,500
12	Chalet	\$21,945,000
13	Scott Byron & Co.	\$21,244,000
14	Jensen Corp.	\$18,450,000
15	Lambert's	\$16,957,500
16	Meadows Farms	\$14,700,000
17	McHale Landscape Design	\$14,600,000
18	Naturescape	\$14,042,351
19	Senske Lawn & Tree Care	\$13,300,000
20	Nissho of California	\$12,560,000*
21	Chapel Valley Landscape Co.	\$11,600,000*
22	Swingle Lawn, Tree and Landscape Management	\$11,222,922
23	Greenscape	\$11,092,000
24	Acres Group	\$10,287,968
25	Designs By Sundown	\$9,500,000

BY MIX (IN U.S. DOLLARS)

% GAIN IN REVENUE PER EMPLOYEE

1	Ryan Lawn & Tree	89%
2	Precision Landscape Management	71.7%
3	Shearon Environmental Design Co.	65.1%
4	Russell Landscape Group	64.1%
5	Meadows Farms	61.9%
6	Parker Interior Plantscape	60.4%
7	Fairco	50%
8	HighGrove Partners	40.2%
9	Dixie Landscape Co.	37.4%
10	ArtisTree Landscape Maintenance & Design	35.3%
11	Lipinski Outdoor Services	25.6%
12	New Way Landscape & Tree Services	20.3%
13	Native Land Design	19.1%
14	Mickman Brothers	18.7%
15	Webb Landscape Management	18.5%
16	Brickman Group	18.2%
17	Scotts Lawn Service	17.6%
18	Designs By Sundown	17.3%
19	Urban Farmer	14.9%
20	Ruppert Landscape Management	12.5%
21	James River Grounds Management	11.3%
22	Moore Landscapes	11.1%
23	Gothic Grounds Management	10.9%
24	American Landscape Systems	10.7%
25	Acres Group	10.3%
	Basnight Land and Lawn	10.3%

% GAIN IN TOTAL EMPLOYEES

1	RCI	91.8%
2	Maldonado Nursery & Landscaping	55.5%
3	Schultz Industries	52.1%
4	Cornerstone Solutions Group	51.9%
5	Denison Landscaping Group	42%
6	Heads Up Landscape	36.2%
7	Dixie Landscape Co.	34.5%
8	Fairco	33.3%
9	Earthworks Inc.	27.9%
10	Reliable Property services	26.1%
11	Sposato Landscape Co.	24%
12	NaturaLawn of American Business Media	22.5%
13	Mainscape	22%
14	Grant & Power Landscaping	21.7%
15	Marina Landscape Management	19.6%
16	PROscape	18.5%
17	Yellowstone Landscape Group	18%
18	The Groundskeeper	16.7%
19	Hoffman Landscapes	14.7%
20	Cleary Bros Landscape Management	12.7%
21	Greenscape	12.5%
	Girard Environmental	12.5%
23	Benchmark Landscape Management	11.8%
24	Environmental Management Services	10.75%
	Bartlett Tree Experts	10.7%

BY EMPLOYEE FACTORS



IN THE

GROW

Angels Landscape Contractors | Garfield, NJ

Angels Landscape Contractors didn't make our *LM150* list last year. But the company is fast on the move. From 2009 to 2010, its revenue nearly doubled — from \$800,000 to \$1.5 million, says Angels General Manager Diego Lovato.

The huge leap is due in part to Angels' commitment to beginning accepted projects within 30 days. That commitment, says Lovato, increases the company's reliability among customers.

Angels' increasing focus on

manager training also has contributed to its newfound growth. As a result of that training, Angels' workers consistently are meeting customers' expectations — and developing a reputation for quality service.

In the last three years, Angels has grown its finances about 30% and its customer base roughly 25%, Lovato says. In 2010, Angels grew most in two areas: gardening and design, and construction. The reason? "People need renovations right now," Lovato says. "With the market down for home sales, if you're selling a house, you need to do updates on your house. And gardening makes a big difference."

Angels' rise in a lagging economy was spurred by its ability to do more with less. "It's unbelievable how efficient we have become," Lovato says.

To be as efficient as possible, Angels' field workers educate customers on how best to maintain their properties once work is finished. That way, Angels doesn't need to return to make repairs, saving the company time and money. Likewise, Angels' managers show employees how to care for equipment, therefore reducing new machinery costs.

Lovato is hardly surprised by Angels' growth, however: "We've been working hard for that," he says. **LM**

2010
GROWTH
47%

Many in the landscape business took another hit in 2010 — but not these growing companies.

BY **BETH GERACI**

SavATree | Bedford Hills, NY



Merging with multiple companies is one way to grow. Just ask the arborists at SavATree, whose 2010 growth resulted largely from its mergers with three companies: Northbrook, IL-based AutumnTree; New Jersey-based Town & Country Tree Service; and Deertech, a producer of ultrasound technology that deters deer from eating shrubs.

The mergers, which earned SavATree the No. 2 spot on our 2011 list of top tree companies, make SavATree a stronger competitor — not only because it now has a larger talent pool, but also because the company can spend more on marketing and reach a wider audience, SavATree President and CEO Daniel van Starrenburg says.

While the Deertech merger enables SavATree to

broaden its range of services, van Starrenburg says joining forces with the AutumnTree staff made sense because the companies were built on similar principles. Joining with Town & Country was an equally attractive prospect, he adds, because “any time you have a presence in the marketplace and are able to merge with, in this case a competitor, it increases market share and visibility.”

But acquiring businesses is fraught with challenges. Enduring change can stress employees, van Starrenburg explains. Consequently, “you have to overcommunicate,” he asserts. “We’ve learned that lesson over and over. You literally have to overcommunicate.”

Just as important as communicating is weighing the companies’ cultural similarities and differences, van Starrenburg says.

Fortunately for SavATree, its employees — whether longtime or newly acquired — are passionate about their work. “If you have employees who are passionate about what they do, that’s the flame you need to keep alive,” van Starrenburg says. **LM**



WHO GREW AND HOW THEY DID IT

These 25 companies had the highest growth rates in 2010. We asked a few how they plan to keep growing in 2011 and how they’ll get it done.

What they’ll do: Continued maintenance growth, capturing expanding capital opportunities (landscape upgrades), increasing irrigation revenue by educating our clients on the importance of being water conscious

How they’ll do it: Honesty, integrity, humility and education

What they’ll do: Environmental services, hardscapes and pool construction and maintenance

How they’ll do it: The environmental division has merged with a larger established company so will not be part of RCI in 2011 — expected revenue \$18M. Hardscapes and pool will continue to grow at a 15% rate due to customer retention and new services. Maintenance has been supported by our first full sales force dedicated to maintenance.

1	Earthworks	32.4%
2	RCI	30.1%
3	The Highridge Corp.	25%
4	Lucas Tree Expert Co.	23.9%
5	Mainscape	22.4%
6	PROscape	21.9%
7	Hoffman Landscapes	21.8%
8	Grant & Power Landscapes	20.3%
9	James River Grounds Management	20%
10	Ryan Lawn & Tree	18.5%
11	HighGrove Partners	18.3%
12	Brickman Group	17.5%
13	Schultz Industries	16.7%
14	Lipinski Outdoor Services	16.2%
15	SavATree	15.8%
16	Gothic Grounds Management	14.4%
17	Native Land Design	14.2%
18	Naturescape	12.8%
19	Russell Landscape Group	12.7%
20	Ruppert Landscape Management	12.5%
21	Basnight Land and Lawn	11.7%
22	Sposato Landscape Co.	11.4%
23	Moore Landscapes	11.1%
	Designs By Sundown	11.1%
25	Land-Tech Enterprises	10.4%

What they’ll do: Start and grow a turf fertilization division; expand our snow and ice management accounts; grow our residential design/build division

How they’ll do it: Hire good quality people that specialize in what we need; develop new programs; get more employees certified in CLT, fertilization applicators, etc.; market to the right audience and areas

What they’ll do: Enhancement Sales; qualifying leads; expanding markets

How they’ll do it: Restructure the way we approach enhancements; Take the time to more accurately qualify a lead; add to sales team, adding branches and satellite offices

2010
GROWTH
15%



Brickman | Gaithersburg, MD

Mother Nature dumped a boatload of snow on the United States last winter — and a boatload of cash on snow removal companies.

The harsh winter was a lucrative one for Brickman, which began ramping up its snow services a few years ago in an effort to partner with its customers year-round. In 2010, with nearly \$194 million in snow revenue, Brickman topped our 2010 snow revenue list.

Brickman President Mark Hjelle says the company experienced double-digit growth in snow removal services last year, servicing “virtually all the major U.S. snow markets.”

According to Hjelle, Brickman’s growth in the national commercial snow market resulted from its management team’s efforts to be proactive, discussing snow removal strategies with clients well in advance — during spring and summer. Among other things, Brickman teams help customers plan which winter services they will need, then create detailed service plans to meet those needs. Such proactivity has enabled Brickman to grow in hard economic times, Hjelle says.

Brickman’s reputation has only been enhanced by its team members’ eagerness to sit down with customers one-on-one, Hjelle says.

The company’s maintenance business, which accounted for nearly \$600 million of Brickman’s \$807 million 2010 revenue, experienced “solid growth” and about a 90% renewal rate in 2010, Hjelle says. Why so high? Because, Hjelle says, Brickman service teams focus on “finding creative ways to deliver solutions to what customers are looking for,” such as how they can best manage their water systems.

“Proactive communication is key,” Hjelle reiterates. “It’s part of the company’s strategy to deliver high quality services on time, as promised.” **LMI**

GrassCor Lawn & Landscapes, LLC | Cincinnati, OH

Not many maintenance companies can say they’ve “grown everywhere” in the last year. But somehow, GrassCor has pulled it off.

“We’re small enough that it’s been easy,” explains GrassCor Vice President Alex Sulfsted. Virtually all aspects of GrassCor’s business grew in 2010, Sulfsted says, especially its commercial business, which constituted 60% of its \$932,000 2010 revenue. The lawn care and enhancements aspects of the business have performed well, too, he reports.

With a projected 2011 revenue of \$1.6 million, GrassCor only continues to expand. How has the company thrived when other companies are struggling? “A lot of long days,” Sulfsted sighs. “Really, we’ve worked on ways to become more efficient, to have a better pricing model. You have to make everything you do as efficient as possible.”

The way to be most efficient, Sulfsted says, is to always ask “what is our goal here with this property?” before beginning a project. “And even then, you have to say to the customer, ‘OK, is this really what you want?’ It’s identifying what they want and what they need.”

Such communication is vital when building and maintaining a loyal clientele, and in 2010 it helped GrassCor nurture a stable of longtime clients who spread the word about the business. GrassCor’s success last year, Sulfsted says, was driven largely by its follow-up with customers, its strong relationships with clients, and customer referrals.

“We were able to come up with ways of reducing some services customers were getting, trying to find them ways to save a little bit of money,” Sulfsted says.

And that’s exactly what GrassCor customers sought. **LMI**

2010
GROWTH
60%



RISING UP

Four companies just off the *LM150* list share how they plan to continue growing.

BY CASEY PAYTON

With the effects of the recession still lingering, it's even more impressive that so many landscape enterprises have been able to grow their business this year. But it's not just the businesses that made the *LM150* that deserve recognition. Plenty of other companies came close to making our list. And still many more had successes that weren't just measured in revenue growth numbers. The following four companies fell just shy of making the *LM150* — and we believe they deserve some recognition as well.

Staying the course

Donald Garritano, president and CEO of Las Vegas-based D&K Landscape, says that trying to get back to the basics that made his company successful in the first place is what has helped them succeed in this tough economy.

“Old-school loyalty in your local market is critical,” he adds.

D&K fell just shy of making the *LM150*, bringing in \$5.3

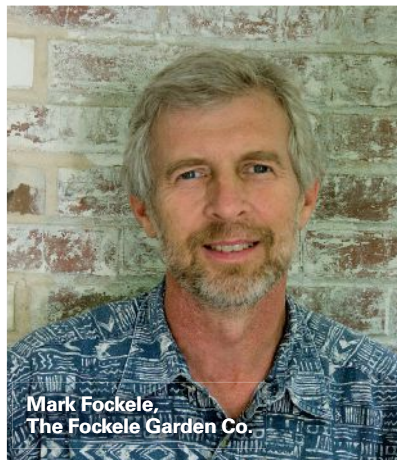
million in revenue in 2010 and growing about 10%. For 2011, the 90% commercial company is looking at being up another 15%.

Landing a large installation contract for the Las Vegas Metropolitan Police Department Headquarters certainly helped. "It was a \$900,000 contract that landed in our laps in April, and will be finished by the middle of June," says Garritano. "Also, our playground division almost tripled its revenues this year."

Creative Play, the company's park, playground and leisure division, was added just two-and-a-half years ago — but has already taken off. This year, it will do almost \$1.8 million in playground sales and installation.

Garritano advises other landscape businesses that want to strive for the same success to "stay the course."

"Reduce unneeded overhead, and stand by your pricing," he adds. "Sell service, not price, and then back it up. Invest in your people and your organization. Now is the time to refine your company."



The Green Lawn Fertilizing executive team (from l. to r.) Alex Wolfington (VP of Sales), Matt Jesson (President), David Chu (CFO), Tom Knopsnyder (VP of Operations)

Client retention

Like many businesses, Earthworks Landscape Services Inc., headquartered in Mukilteo, WA — with branches in Bellevue and Sumner — has had to look at all its expenses and cut where possible. Where it did not cut back, however, was in client services and quality control. That has helped Earthworks to continue to have success in both client retention and overall growth. Offering 100% commercial service, it did \$5,065,490 in 2010.

While the company only grew 2.5% over 2009, company president Michael Moshcatel says he's quite satisfied with that number.

"In this environment, we were just happy to grow, and were a bit more profitable as well — especially after having a net revenue decrease from 2008 to 2009 of around 12%," he explains.

Plus, 2011 is on track to grow the company even more, he says.

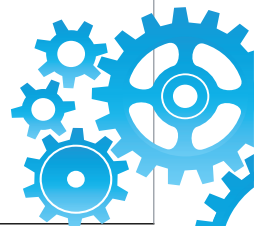
"Going back to the theory of maintaining our existing customer base rather than replacing them with newer, lower-

yielding clients, we have worked hard on retention — and had an extremely good year in that area," says Moshcatel. "We were able to grow slightly this year due to our clients starting to invest in enhancement services. We did more large-scale projects this past year."

Moshcatel says he'd also attribute the company's success to its long-tenured management team and a stable work force — people who share the corporate vision. He says the following are the company's keys to success: "Communicating with our clients to find out what their budget mandates are, and being flexible to work with them should cuts be necessary; being proactive by monitoring jobs and maintaining quality control; and being timely and responsive when a problem does occur. These are the major components to our success, and we feel they're even more important when our clients are struggling."

An open ear

Matt Jesson, owner and president of West Chester, PA-based



Green Lawn Fertilizing Inc., attributes his company's success to having the right people for the job. He's quick to emphasize that the company operates as a team.

To keep that momentum going, Green Lawn takes the hiring process very seriously — hiring only about one employee for every 100 or more resumes submitted.

"This is a very time-consuming, expensive and difficult process, but the service business is about finding great people who will do what it takes to keep customers satisfied," says Jesson. "We continue to spend more money on advertising so we can increase the number of people who apply for jobs, in an effort to find the best in the industry."

The effort seems to be paying off: The business saw a 2010 revenue of \$5,000,273.

"Year-to-date, we have been able to increase revenue between 12% and 15%, and our customer cancel rate has decreased," says Jesson. "This is a true sign we are implementing the proper changes, and listening to customers to make sure we provide quality service."

Change is nothing that Green Lawn shies away from, should it prove to be valuable to the business. Jesson knows that customers will be honest about what's working — and what isn't — and he pays attention to what they say. In the past year, the company has received more than 3,000 feedback response surveys, and Jesson

values every one.

"This past year, we have made more changes than ever," he admits. "One idea we learned from customer surveys was they needed more crabgrass control. We also increased insect control by adding additional free applications for customers to prevent issues in the summer."

Jesson isn't afraid to lean on industry mentors for help, either. In 2003, when he was transitioning his business from "Jesson Landscaping" into "Green Lawn Fertilizing," he remembers reading Landscape Management's *LM150* list and reaching out to several of the cream-of-the-crop companies. He wanted to know how he could lead Green Lawn to become an *LM150* company.

"I sent letters and Tastykakes to leaders in the industry such as Jim Campanella, Paul Wagner, Ken White, Chris Senske and Mr. Massey, asking for help and about bringing my management team out for a visit," he recalls. "Most people were very receptive, and since 2003, Jim Campanella has been my closest mentor. I gave Jim a scorecard from Pebble Beach in 2004 and said that when we hit the 5,000 customer mark, I'd take him there. In 2007, we exceeded the 5,000 customer mark."

A strategic focus

Mark Fockele, owner of The Fockele Garden Co. in Gainesville, GA, says that an



Michael J. Moshcatel, Earthworks Landscape Services



emphasis on business development paid off in 2010. The

company had a strong year, pulling in \$3.25 million. But it's been a specific focus on work in the healthcare industry that Fockele sees as the most strategic move.

"It does seem, at least so far, that the healthcare industry has been able to maintain its ability to carry on with their operations and continue to build new facilities and improve old ones, while other commercial properties are holding off," says Fockele, who adds that the company has a commercial base of about 60%.

In addition to focusing on more work for hospitals and other healthcare facilities, Fockele says he's been stressing to existing clientele that the company is willing to travel to distant locations for installation jobs. He says that's helped get new jobs from his existing client base — customers where good working relationships have already been developed.

Being based in a drought-prone area, Fockele has gained recognition for offering sustainable services, like rainwater harvesting. "It's a service that our customers like and that helps preserve our revenue." **LM**



LESSONS FROM THE RECESSION

After working more than 45 years in the Green Industry, Erv Denig was thinking about retiring. That didn't seem like an unreasonable expectation, except for one thing.

Denig was making his plans when the economy dried up faster than a plot of grass in the arid Southwest. Retirement will happen, just not anytime soon.

"That's completely out of the picture. I've lost half of my 401(k) in the stock market," says Denig, CEO of Lawn & Turf Landscaping, Fort Wayne, IN.

Denig and many other contractors have seen their plans change. Denig, whose business did about \$2 million last year, isn't sure how much longer he'll have to work before he can reach his dream. And the challenges this recession created are not limited to smaller enterprises.

"It's basically setting the landscape industry back 10-15 years, when it was harder to sell landscaping," says Bill Davids, president of Clarence Davids & Co., Matteson, IL, and No. 84 on the *LM150* list.

"My work is not coming back," Denig says. "The

The economy created a self-preservation attitude and taught many Green Industry business owners new ways to run their companies.

BY **DAN JACOBS** EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

housing boom is gone. All we're doing is remodeling, retrofitting existing landscaping."

Denig, Davids and just about every other contractor on the planet has been forced to evaluate how they do business. Maybe they cut staff, manipulated the service mix or became hyper-focused on

operations and efficiency; definitely they've become hyper-focused.

The mantra for many executives, says Jeffrey Scott, author, consultant and former Green Industry business owner, is "I'm working a lot more hours; I have a lot less free time. This is not the dream."

Of course not everyone suffered.

"I had some clients who continued to grow, continued to do well," Scott says. "These were companies that were well run. They had a great marketing and branding program. They had a great group of people."



New Thinking

In other words, executives who learned their lessons early and are running lean, efficient operations.

The owners and managers of companies who make it through this downturn are unquestionably better businessmen. That will allow them to get back to pursuing and more quickly achieving their dreams.

Lessons learned

When the economy is riding high it's much easier to run a successful enterprise. But as the river of money recedes, mistakes and waste become the rocky riverbed that can run a business aground.

For months, there have been reports of bankers being stingy with their money, making it difficult for some business owners to borrow. More recently, contractors are suggesting that's not so much the case anymore — but there's a catch.

"Our banker, he wants us to borrow money," Davids says. "There're only so many successful companies out there and he sees us as one. There's plenty of money out there to be borrowed. If the bank is telling you 'no' there's probably something on your financials."

And that's the key. The heady days of lending that led to the subprime mortgage fiasco are over.

Companies are starting to pay attention to balance sheets, says Bruce Wilson, *LM's* Best Practices columnist and co-owner of the Wilson-Oyler Group. They've always managed their profit and loss statements, but banks are putting more covenants into their loan agreements.

"A lot of them really didn't understand," Wilson says. "They've heard the ratios, but they didn't understand where they come from."

And it's not confined to small operations.



"THERE ARE WAY TOO MANY CONTRACTORS. THERE REALLY NEEDS TO BE LESS. WE'RE ALL TRYING TO VIE FOR THE SAME DOLLARS."

— Bill Davids, president, Clarence Davids & Co.

"There are a lot of companies in the industry where the owner makes a lot of money so they aren't as profit driven as they should be," Wilson says.

Along with a sound financial approach comes a focus on people. While many have reduced staff it's those who have cut back spending on their employees who will suffer.

For Todd Pugh, CEO and founder of Enviroscapes and co-founder of Green

Industry Innovators, one of the keys is continual training. It's something he's maintained at Enviroscapes since its inception 15 years ago.

One thing is for sure. The company that comes out the other end of this recession will be a different one than the one that went into it.

"We will be a completely different company then," Pugh says. "Our DNA will be different; we'll be a better company."

Changes

To be sure, some companies made money. There are several on the *LM150* list who boosted revenue, but

THE GOOD NEWS THE GOOD NEWS THE GOOD NEWS THE GOOD NEWS

Small business **bankruptcy filings** (companies with fewer than 100 employees) **declined in Q4** of 2010 to 341, an **18% drop** from the 416 during the same quarter of 2009.

Source: Equifax

The number of **small business loans** approved in the first quarter of 2011 **rose to 1,294**. That's a more than **50% increase** from the 852 during Q1 of 2010.

Source: Biz2Credit

Companies with fewer than 500 workers hired **168,000 new employees** in April 2011, which raised that total to nearly 91 million, **up 2%** from 89.6 million at that time last year.

Source: Automatic Data Processing Inc.

Venture capital investments in business **jumped to \$5.9 billion** in Q1 of 2011, a **26% bump** from Q1 a year ago.

Source: The MoneyTree Report



very few, if any at all, talked about maintaining the status quo.

To compensate for his lost business, Denig, like many other contractors, has shifted his service mix by “beefing up” snow removal and chemical lawn care.

A shift away from the design/build arm of the business forced many companies to downsize or at least reassign those workers, which could cause problems for some when the work returns.

Figuring out how to deal with more work is a problem a lot of companies would love to have.

Cutting back employees and other expenditures is one way to deal with falling revenues, but it’s not a long-term solution, and it certainly will catch companies unprepared when the economy ramps up. And it’s not just when the work comes back. Many companies tried to save money by spending less in areas other than personnel.

“Some made money cutting back, but they also cut back on marketing,” Scott says. “They made money, but it was short term. The need for customer service is going to grow,” Scott continues. “If you weren’t a great marketer, you can’t just market when things go downhill, it’s too late.”

Employee outlook

For years the complaint among business owners was the lack of quality employees. That was most clear — or at least most complained about — at a mid-manager level, including foremen and account managers. There aren’t many benefits to a recession, but this was one area people expected to improve.

“Everyone assumed the pool of candidates would be bigger and better,” says Jennifer Buck, owner of Buck Consulting, which does recruiting for Green Industry companies. “Even though the pool became bigger, it didn’t become better.”

Companies laid off workers, but it was the non-producers, employees who survived more from workplace inertia than the quality of their work. Companies simply can’t afford to carry the dead weight any longer.

“When it first hit, we let go several people,” Davids says. “You take the rest of your people and you double up. You get as efficient as you possibly can. The hardest thing about this whole thing is getting everyone on board and letting them know they’re going to work harder for less money.”

That process is made a little easier when they see their less productive peers being shown the door.

“You have to get all the employees in on this,” Davids says. “Once they see you’re serious and several people have exited, you get the buy-in pretty quick.”

The economic outlook

There are signs the economy is improving.

“In general, companies I work with are feeling a little bit of an improvement,” Wilson says. “The higher end residential construction is picking up. The maintenance companies are holding their own.”

That’s not to say everyone is ready to resume business as usual.

“The biggest effects we’ve seen is it’s long staying,” Pugh says of the economic downturn. “Pricing has continually gone down. There’s been an influx of new competition. There are a lot of general contractors that are bringing the work back in house.”

Davids agrees the influx of new competitors is a problem.

“There are way too many contractors,” Davids

“MY WORK IS NOT COMING BACK. THE HOUSING BOOM IS GONE. ALL WE’RE DOING IS REMODELING, RETROFITTING EXISTING LANDSCAPING.”

— Erv Denig, CEO
Lawn & Turf Landscaping



says. “There really needs to be less. We’re all trying to vie for the same dollars.”

That competition has forced business owners to focus on all those things they always knew they needed to do, but could get away with not worrying about.

“It wasn’t that we weren’t doing any of this stuff, but what happened it’s like going from playing in the little leagues to the majors,” Pugh says.

Maybe it’s all in the attitude.

“It’s a tough time and we’re all experiencing it,” Pugh says. “We’re resilient people. At the end of the day this is just a speck on the timeline of life. When we look back. For me, at 39 years old, I feel blessed.”

And if the rest of us could learn to feel that way, perhaps we’ve learned the best lesson of all. **LM**



VOICE ACTIVATED.

For more than five years, customers like Dennis Allendorf, Randy Gill, Jerry Dallman, Tim McComish, and Brad Jorgensen worked alongside our engineering team to design the D-Series. Along the way, their words and ideas were documented, studied, and transformed into our most productive skid steers yet. From the fuel-saving, noise-reducing auto-idle feature, to a simple switch that allows you to easily shift control patterns, to a host of outstanding comfort upgrades, their words are echoed throughout the entire machine. See how their voice was our command at your John Deere dealer or our website.



JOHN DEERE

YOU'RE ON.™

www.JohnDeere.com/YoureOn

MAINTENANCE: FUNGICIDES

Arysta LifeScience

The Disarm G granular strobilurin formulation is priced at a reasonable cost per 1,000 sq. ft. — so users can apply the same premium strobilurin disease control used on golf courses at an economical cost for their lawn care accounts. In addition, the company says, Disarm G is the only strobilurin granule labeled for control of light-to-moderate dollar spot infestations. TotalDiseaseControl.com/DisarmG

United Turf Alliance

ArmorTech MYCLO 20EW Fungicide relies on the systemic activity of myclobutanil to deliver preventive and curative disease control to turfgrass and landscape ornamentals, as well as greenhouse and nursery ornamentals. It is effective against more than 20 diseases, including anthracnose, brown patch, summer patch, snow mold, dollar spot and others. UTAarmortech.com



Valent Professional Products

To help end users tackle the toughest diseases facing them this season, the 2011 Tourney Fungicide In-Season Promotion is available to Green Industry professionals who purchase Tourney from a distributor or retailer now through June 30, 2011. Tourney controls a broad spectrum of the toughest diseases, including anthracnose, summer patch, gray leaf spot and many others in turf, and powdery mildew, apple scab, rusts and leaf spots in woody outdoor ornamentals and landscape settings. Because it can do the job of multiple products in just one application, Tourney helps users get the most from their fungicide budget and save time. Confirmed purchases of Tourney made and received by June 30, 2011 will be eligible for rebates of 10% to 30% per pound, depending on purchase volume. The promotion is not available to any commercial retailers or distributors, nor does it apply to purchases made during 2010 programs. Invoices must be submitted to www.valentpro.com/promo by July 15, 2011, to be eligible for a rebate. ValentPro.com/tourney



Growth Products

Companion Liquid Biological Fungicide prevents, controls and suppresses a broad range of root and foliar diseases, including anthracnose, brown patch, dollar spot, summer patch, fusarium patch, pythium and phytophthora. Companion was the first-ever biofungicide approved by the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, according to the company. It contains the environmentally friendly GB03 strain of *Bacillus subtilis*, which prevents and controls plant diseases through multiple modes of action. GB03 produces a broad-spectrum antibiotic that disrupts pathogen cell-wall formation, and it stimulates a plant's natural immune system. As a competitive and fast-colonizing rhizobacterium, GB03 also crowds out pathogens to prevent their growth and antagonistic effects. Because Companion is a biological fungicide, pathogens do not develop disease resistance. It can be used in rotation with chemical fungicides or be tank-mixed with smaller amounts of chemical fungicides for improved efficacy. GrowthProducts.com



Bayer Environmental Science

Armada fungicide is a pre-mixed product containing two active ingredients, triadimefon and trifloxystrobin, for a broader spectrum of activity against most turf diseases of importance in lawns — and more convenience. It is designed specifically for Green Industry professionals and offers 30-day control of two major turfgrass diseases: brown patch and dollar spot. It also controls grey leaf spot, anthracnose, various leaf spots, red thread, southern blight and summer patch, among other turf diseases. It offers good compatibility for tank mixing with foliar fertilizers or insecticides. BackedByBayer.com



Earth & Turf Products

The new Heavy-Duty Rubber Drag Mat is designed

to break up debris after core aeration and level fields after topdressing. The 3/4-in.-thick mats measure 6x6 ft. and are made from heavy-duty, recycled rubber. A durable, long-lasting hitch system sandwiches the rubber between two heavy steel plates using 7/16-in. bolts. All mats are shipped rolled up and bound with two cable ties. Total weight of each mat is 133 lbs. (pull chains are not included). EarthAndTurf.com

LAWN CARE: TURF SEED AND EQUIPMENT



Turfco

Featuring changes derived from customer feedback, the newly redesigned T3000 spreader and sprayer features improved durability and reduced maintenance needs. The unit maintains the overall compact design that can fit through a 36-in. gate, while still offering 6- and 9-ft.-wide spreading widths, making it versatile enough for both residential and large com-

mercial properties. An optional electric start is available, and a standard 16-amp charging system provides turf professionals with greater versatility in mounting accessories. Cruise control helps maintain speed while freeing operators' hands to control spreading and spraying. A new variable speed diaphragm pump features Viton valves for extended life and minimized maintenance. An improved spinner design is longer lasting and easier to maintain. TurfcoDirect.com

Billy Goat

Billy Goat's new Self Propelled Over Seeder reduces fatigue associated with pushing and features intuitive forward and reverse operator controls. The 22-in.-wide unit features an exclusive 11-blade slicing reel that floats along contours of yards, increasing seed-to-soil contact and improving germination rates, the company says. The unit comes standard with a 30-lb. seed box that is elevated above the turf to eliminate clogging that may occur from moisture. An Auto Drop system automatically starts and stops seed drop with reel engagement and disengagement, conserving seed and preventing "end of run" seed piling. Infinite depth adjustment of the slicer blades promotes longer blade life vs. presets, and seed settings are found on board for operator convenience. BillyGoat.com



IRRIGATION: CONTROLLERS AND LOCATORS



Armada Technologies

The new Pro-800 Hi-Power Irrigation Wire and Valve Locator features a rechargeable, 12v transmitter battery, a 20% more powerful transmitter to track cable over longer distances, a triple AC buzz and hum filter for a clearer signal, and a new wireless connection/broadcast mode so users don't need to connect to the wires to get a tracking signal. The unit provides a powerful and accurate irrigation valve and wire fault and tracing capability, the company says. ArmadaTech.com

Rain Bird

Rain Bird has enhanced the former STPI residential controller. Now known as the new STP Plus and available in 4-, 6- and 9-zone models, the controller is user-friendly. New icon-based At-a-Glance programming makes it possible for anyone to quickly set irrigation schedules without looking at a manual or requiring professional assistance. When programming a zone, all irrigation schedule information is displayed on the controller's screen. RainBird.com



Underhill International

Sapien is a dedicated two-wire controller that operates up to 63 stations. It works in new irrigation systems, a multi-wire conversion or a two-wire (or multi-wire) expansion. No special wiring or field grounding is required. With an easy-to-read backlit display, the unit features an exclusive LightTouch screen that "talks" the user through the set-up with buttons that light up sequentially. Sapien offers ABCD and manual programs, seasonal adjust by percentage and 12 start times per day. It is radio-control ready and rain/wind/frost sensor compatible. The controller measures 6.3 in. high x 7.33 in. wide x 1.78 in. deep. Stainless steel wall mounts, waterproof enclosures and pedestal models are available. Underhill.us

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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.

Your enhancement profit plan

Enhancements are such a vital service for customers and source of revenues and profits for maintenance companies, let's stop and consider this line of work again.

Remember, enhancements can and should be profitable. In fact, many companies consistently top 50% gross margin over a year's worth of enhancements. That's after labor costs, workers comp costs, cost of materials and sub costs.

Admittedly, it's not always easy to be so profitable. In a lot of cases the jobs are small — making organization, set up and pricing critical. Larger construction jobs don't require such precise execution because of their longer duration.

Get your pricing right

There are many ways to diminish returns on enhancements, usually starting with pricing. Account managers are the primary sales agents, and if they're inexperienced in construction they often inaccurately price the work. They might overlook important issues. Examples of profit killers they might overlook include:

- › Underground interference such as drainage lines, irrigation lines and lighting wires that could significantly add to the job's cost
- › Site preparation issues such as removal of existing plants and roots
- › Not accounting for disposal of excess soil when installing a large number of plants

Sometimes a small amount of masonry, or a small water feature can't effectively be subbed out. In these cases, the contractor ends up having to figure out how to do it.

These examples are just three of many. That's why it's critical to create a checklist for the person doing the pricing. That checklist must list these and other unique considerations that add costs to jobs. The checklist will remind the people who sell enhancements to identify them and account for them in their pricing. Nobody likes surprises, especially customers.

Just as deadly to job profits is the practice of over-engineering an enhancement. These include enhancements that stretch your team's skill set. This could include masonry, retaining walls and similar specialized work. Sometimes a small amount of masonry, or a small water feature can't effectively be subbed out. In these cases, the contractor ends up having to figure out how to do it, complicating an otherwise simple job.

Producing the work

Information is key to efficiently and profitably producing the enhancement. A company's estimating system should produce a work order with an hourly breakdown of how much time each task should take. Among other things, this would include site-prep, removal of old plants, irrigation modifications, planting and cleanup.

The work order should also have a materials list and the cost that was included in the estimate so whoever is buying the material knows the numbers. That way, the purchaser won't exceed the cost and can, hopefully, get a good price, thus improving the margin.

Finally, the work order should include pictures of the area to be improved along with a list of specialized tools and/or equipment needed for the job.

As you can see, it's not complicated. Selling and doing enhancements just require planning, discipline and execution. Companies that develop a step-by-step approach to selling and delivering enhancements excel at this potentially profitable line of work.



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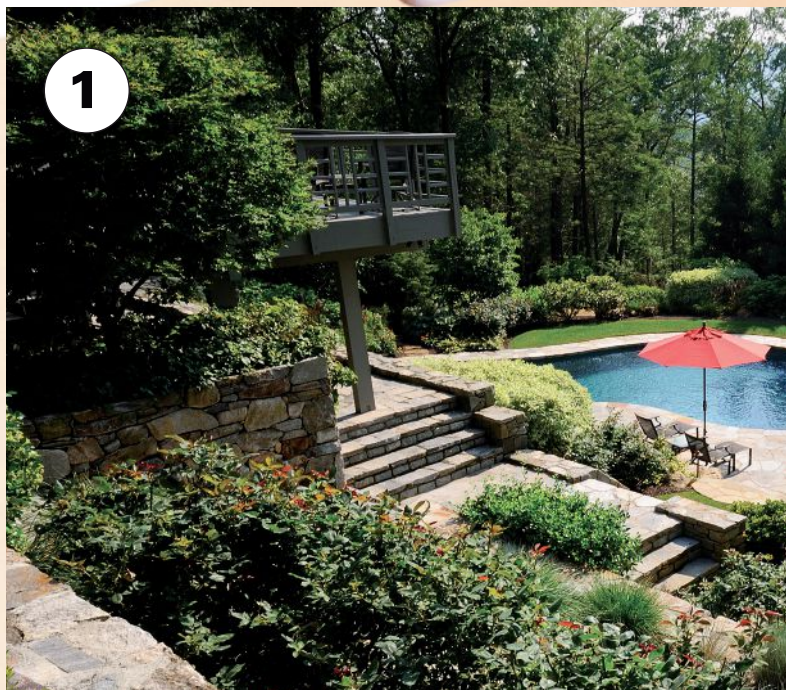
Create an upstate New York oasis for busy Manhattanites.

The new owners of this contemporary house wanted to create a weekend getaway in the Hudson Highlands where they could escape from their busy life in Manhattan. To them, that meant the following:

- › Make the house invisible from the gravel access road and three neighboring properties.
- › Take full advantage of the views of the bend in the Hudson River at West Point.
- › Add a swimming pool and spa.
- › Fully experience the wooded nature of their property by creating paths and enhancing the understory as a Ken Druse-type woodland garden.

The couple turned to The LaurelRock Co., a Wilton, CT-based firm. Led by CEO Dickson DeMarche, FASLA, LaurelRock was able to meet the above goals despite a few challenges along the way, including:

- › The house was situated less than 60 ft. from the access road, at the end of a straight driveway that threaded between ledge outcrops.
- › The garage was only 50 ft. from the northern neighbor's driveway and parking area.
- › Opening views through the trees to the river had to be carefully executed to avoid exposing views to a private boarding school situated downslope.
- › Existing retaining walls at the driveway and under the deck were sound, but the dry-laid walls between them were failing. Also, the steps from the driveway down to the terrace level were relocated to allow for the expanded deck.
- › The septic system location required placing the pool close to the house and on ledge rock, requiring careful blasting.
- › The largest portion of the woods, where the woodland garden was to be created, was inaccessible by machine. To compensate, the LaurelRock team hand-carted materials more than 300 ft.



PHOTOS COURTESY: LAURENCE MERZ PHOTOGRAPHY

THE WORK

1 | Step by step. From near the garage at the entry level, this view shows the expanded deck (at the highest level), the existing stone terrace (at mid-level) and the new steps leading to the upper and lower lawn areas and the pool.

2 | Holding court. The pergola strengthens the feeling of “entry court” by connecting the garage to the house. It also adds shadow interest, and creates a foreground frame for the view. Paving replaced gravel at the doors to differentiate pedestrian circulation. Without diminishing the already-restricted maneuvering space for automobiles, planting was introduced to separate the driveway from the house and the end stone wall. It also serves to highlight and frame the entrances and the viewing location under the pergola.

3 | The water's edge. Note the new planter wall next to the expanded deck and stairs. Boulders were placed instead of walls to retain grade adjacent to the steps to the lower lawn area, transitioning to the more casual pool area design.

4 | Natural beauty. The woodland garden is in the lowest and least-accessible part of the site. Large trees and slab steps were brought in by ball carts. In the foreground is the bog garden, featuring sedges, phlox and primroses.

5 | Reuse — and reinforce. Boulders from the pool excavation were used to reinforce the slope between the house and the pool, and to create a retaining wall on the downside of the pool area terrace. Shrubs and vines were planted to stabilize the soil between the boulders. Perennials were then added for color.

6 | Rock stars. Masons from MNM Masonry Contractors, Ossining, NY, took care to match the original wall style and tie all levels together.

As one of the only landscape design/build and maintenance firms in Fairfield County that started as a landscape architectural firm, LaurelRock takes a design-driven approach to its clientele. This particular project garnered a 2010 Environmental Improvement Grand Award from the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). For more information, visit LaurelRock.com.



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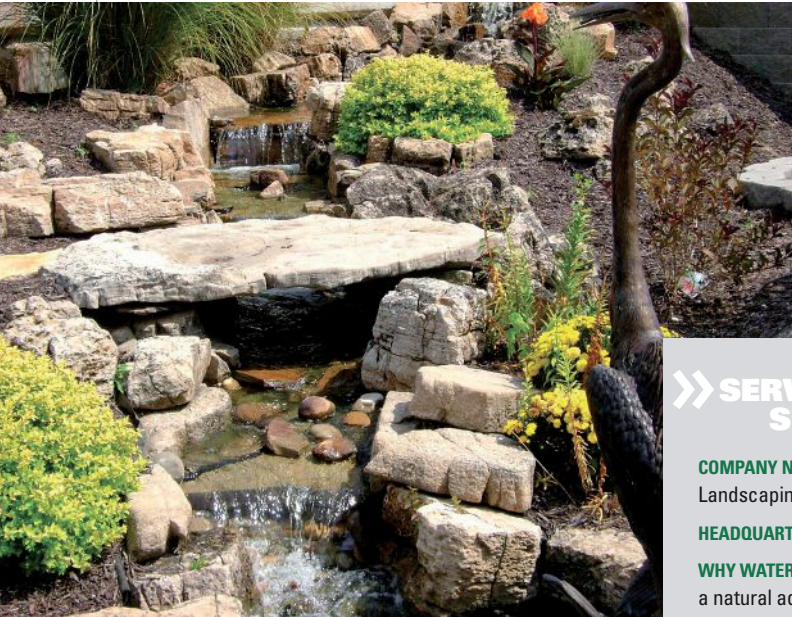


6



Clients love the sound of water

Water features flow nicely with Weilbacher Landscaping's other services



A Weilbacher waterfall made from limestone boulders.

Weilbacher admits selling water features has become tougher in today's shaky economy. Many potential clients view them as an extravagance. Consequently, Weilbacher promotes moderately priced water features that add curb appeal and increase property value.

Pondless waterfalls in the \$2,000 to \$5,000 price range have become more popular and are easier to sell, he says.

"With the pondless waterfall, you don't have to build the whole pond. It makes them low maintenance and more cost effective. But you still get the same look and sound," he says.

Since adding a water feature division, Weilbacher says his website has become more important. Clients want to see recent color photos so Weilbacher makes sure his site is up to date.

Aesthetics are involved in water features, and Weilbacher says it takes a keen eye to make a job attractive. However, that's where he's seen other contractors make the biggest mistakes.

"I've seen other landscapers just dig a hole and throw the water feature and some rocks in," he says. "There's more to it than that. We actually go to the quarry and hand-select boulders. And we may have rocks all laying out on the ground and rearrange them with the Bobcat three or four times until we get it just right.

"You do have to have an artistic eye to be successful with water features. Having attractive existing jobs makes a big difference in future sales," he says.

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

» SERVICE SNAPSHOT

COMPANY NAME: Weilbacher Landscaping

HEADQUARTERS: Millstadt, IL

WHY WATER FEATURES? It was a natural addition for the 8-person company that does about 90% residential work.

INITIAL INVESTMENT: It depends on the size and scale of projects. Weilbacher purchased a \$25,000 Bobcat Mini Excavator that could be rented for about \$250/day. Other equipment includes hand tools like shovels, rakes, and knives. Smaller water features only require the basic tools plus labor.

INVESTMENT RECOUP TIME: Installing \$2,000 water features, should return \$1,000 on each one. Labor is the biggest expense since large equipment isn't required for smaller water features.

WHY CUSTOMERS LIKE IT: Water features create a relaxing retreat at home. Instead of taking costly vacations, clients enjoy a paradise right outside their door.

A SIMPLE REQUEST FROM a client led Andrew Weilbacher to launch a profitable new division offering water features. Weilbacher, owner of Weilbacher Landscaping, Millstadt, IL, recalls he was finishing a retaining wall using boulders when a client suggested a waterfall would also look nice.

After thinking it over, he accepted the job, invested \$25,000 in a new Bobcat Mini Excavator and installed a \$55,000 water feature for the client. That experience five years ago convinced Weilbacher his team could do this work well. Today, the segment brings in about 25% of the revenue for the \$500,000 business.

Now whenever he's working up a landscape design, he always suggests a water feature. Any time of year is fine for selling, but Weilbacher prefers not to do installs during January or February when the ground is frozen. He'd rather not risk tearing up clients' yards with large equipment. That's easy to do when the ground is frozen or wet and muddy. In Illinois, summer is the best time to build water features.



THE PRICE IS RIGHT

The new look uses clean and washed river stone. The old look (inset) hides houses behind older, declining trees.

A contractor uses innovative financing to land a project other companies might have had to take a pass on.

BY **CURT HARLER**

Sometimes, having too much business can be a challenge, too. That's the situation that faced Kevin Winkler, project manager at #1 Landscaping, Medina, OH. #1 Landscaping signed a contract with the Valley Creek Homeowners Association (HOA) to re-landscape about a dozen properties this past spring. When neighbors saw how well the job was going, others hopped on board. Soon, the job had grown to two dozen properties.

Enough was enough. Winkler had to put the brakes on other homeowners who clamored to get on board: A third phase was scheduled for this fall.

Time for a change

When the Valley Creek allotment was designed as part of a planned community in Strongsville, OH, some 40 years ago, the

INNOVATIVE PRICING



Ron Bostaph waters plantings. Even with a blazing hot summer, they had fewer than 5% failure with the establishment. Most of those that did not make it were maples.



architect, Bob Schmidt, did an award-winning job of planning landscape features. The area is highly xeriscaped, which is unusual in an area with the 40-in. rainfall a short drive from Lake Erie. Trees and shrubs were designed for minimal maintenance.

Over the years, however, trees grew and shrubs bushed out. Coming into 2009, the homeowners at Valley Creek knew something needed to be done.

“We’ve worked in the area for over 20 years,” says Tom Csanyi, president of #1 Landscaping. In that time, he adds, the area matured. Some property owners did not do a lot with the original landscaping.

“Updating a project like this is a big (financial) hit for a homeowners association,” Csanyi says. “It’s a big nut to crack to do the finances and get everyone on the same page.”

What makes the Valley Creek Association project so successful is an innovative payment plan worked out between the HOA Board and #1 Landscaping. While many landscapers are reluctant to deal with homeowners’ associations, the deal Valley Creek developed could serve as a model of how to negotiate successfully.

Financing the job

“We had never had a special assessment for our homeowners, and I didn’t want to be the first,” says Ron Bostaph, president of the Val-

continued on page 44

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Skipping cleanups saved money and let the HOA offer members a \$500 rebate.

continued from page 42

ley Creek HOA. “Doing it the way we did it made it work for everyone.”

Bostaph says he was reluctant to tell everyone to fork over a couple thousand dollars for landscaping. Instead, he came up with a strategy that included dropping the planned fall and spring cleanups the seasons before the project began, having the HOA pay for removal of the mature and dying trees, and refunding each homeowner \$500 for the work done on their properties.

Bostaph admits the landscape “didn’t look real good” for a while after they skipped the cleanups. However, the cost savings allowed the HOA to offer each association member a \$500 rebate once they got the job done on their property.

Tree removal cost the HOA \$280 to \$300 a tree, and was necessary because many huge conifers suffered canker. Because the same landscape contractor did all the work, the cost of preparation was minimal.

“The way we did this project allowed us to

continued on page 46

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continued from page 44

leverage a lot of time and design work,” says Csanyi. “For a small amount of money, the association got a lot of impact.

“Many communities will be in a similar situation,” Csanyi continues. “They need to come up with a game plan and be proactive before they start losing trees — or having people go off and do their own thing. It was

“With the \$500 back, it was a no-brainer.”

— TOM CSANYI, PRESIDENT, #1 LANDSCAPING

good for us since it was done in volume. It was good for the residents the way the financing was set up.”

Too many landscapers shun multi-family projects because the financing gets complicated. Personalities get involved. Seniors on fixed incomes complain when they are required to pay money they would rather spend elsewhere. Other residents want to see their HOA money spent on other tasks, like painting.

“To get everyone to buy into the project, the HOA gave people \$500 from the general fund,” Csanyi explains. “With the \$500 back, it was a no-brainer.”

As work on each property was done, the homeowner paid #1 Landscaping and the homeowner was reimbursed by the HOA. “People got a good deal,” Csanyi says.

There is no question #1 Landscaping got a good deal, too. It would be marginally profitable for a company to do the design work and site work required for just one home. The typical homeowner paid between \$1,200 and \$1,600 for the work done. However, multiplied by 15 or 18 jobs, the project became quite viable.

On the other hand, few HOAs would welcome a \$25,000 hit to their general fund for a landscape makeover when other projects always loom on the horizon. “It’s a lot of money, whether the HOA pays for it or increases dues,” Csanyi points out. The plan worked out by the Valley Creek Association and #1 Landscaping, he says, made it viable for everyone.

Homeowners were charged by the size of their yards — but almost every lot was different.

“We didn’t split hairs,” Csanyi says.

continued on page 48

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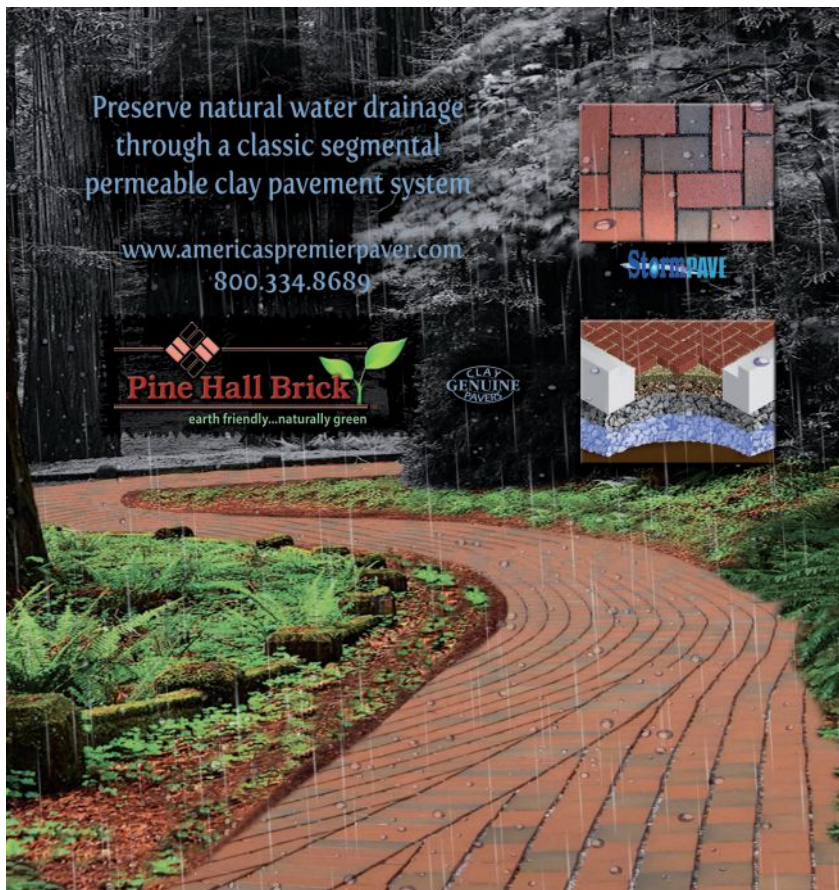
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INNOVATIVE PRICING



The stone links neighbor to neighbor, giving the feel of a dry riverbed carving through the properties.



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#1 Landscaping picked four typical-sized properties, small to large, and did designs for each. The team then ported the designs to other, similar-sized units. The charge included all landscaping and materials. Removal of mature trees was a separate phase, and was paid by the HOA.

"It was a major change in curb appeal," Csanyi says. "We got rid of the dense trees and went to a cleaner, open look."

Evergreens were used instead of deciduous trees — largely to cut fall maintenance. Dwarf conifers replaced many of the superannuated blue spruce. "It worked out really well," Csanyi says.

Overcoming challenges

Not every homeowner was delighted with the program. Several opted out, especially some who had invested their own money in landscaping in the couple of years leading up to the project. "I didn't have it done. I didn't think it was a good idea," says one 30-year resident.

continued on page 50



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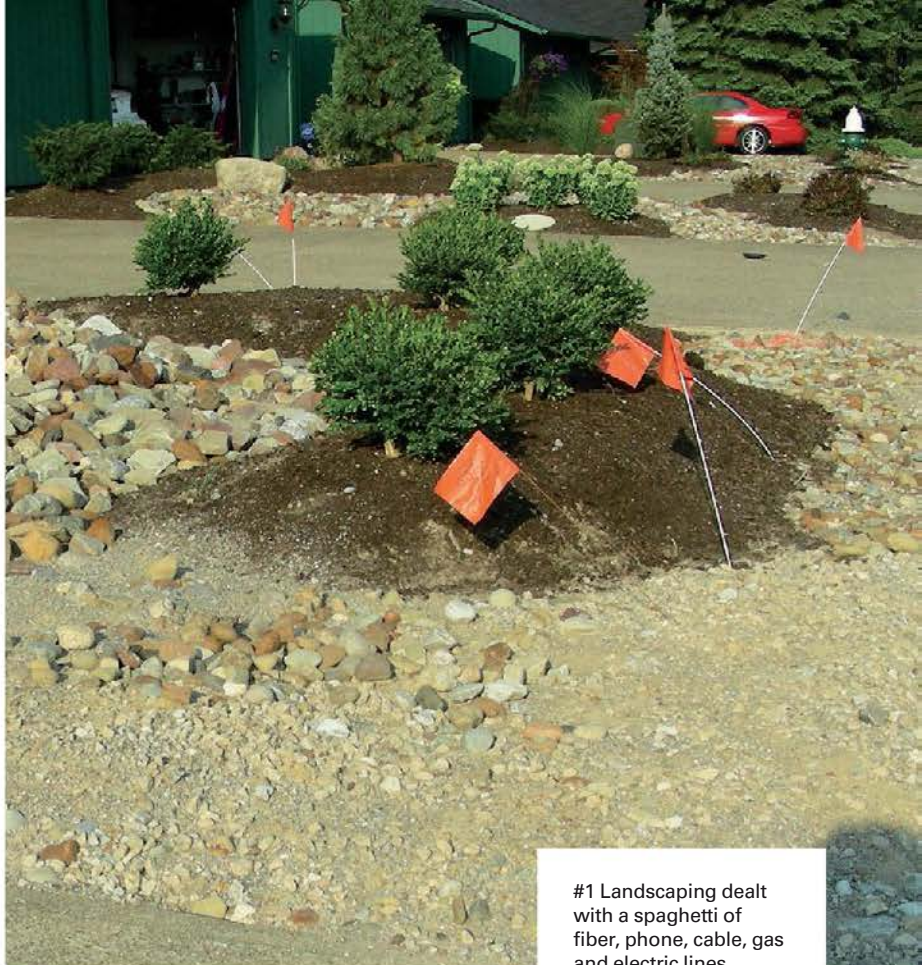
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She notes that she pays \$120 a month in condo fees and expects to get landscaping services as a part of that package.

Other residents had gone their own way with their landscaping. As a result, Csanyi says, the area became a mixture of styles — of red, black and brown mulch; of well-trimmed features and out-of-control plantings. Many residents had come to love the tall, old trees and did not want them taken out. Csanyi says some did not realize the trees were dying and were more burdens than beauties.

Other longtime residents, happy with the status quo, had lost touch with updates in the nursery business. “They remember their junipers and Taxus,” Csanyi says. “But cultivars have changed. People need to see new ideas.”

Valley Creek HOA first hired #1 Landscaping to do the design work. #1 Landscaping called in Jennifer Mil-



#1 Landscaping dealt with a spaghetti of fiber, phone, cable, gas and electric lines.

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brandt, the city arborist, to look at the site. She made her recommendations, which were incorporated into the plan.

Bostaph championed the project. “Ron took the bull by the horns and worked with us throughout,” Csanyi says. Bostaph even handpicked specific trees to be used.

The design preserved the xeriscaping, with river stone linking unit to unit — giving the feel of a dry riverbed carving through the properties.

The old, huge blue spruce were replaced with baby blue-eyed spruce, columnar blue spruce, snow fountain weeping cherry, Japanese maple and a number of understory plants like emerald and gold Euonymus.

Once the job got underway, it turned out that even the buried utilities were a tough situation to handle. “Utilities were a nightmare,” Csanyi says. “It was a spaghetti of fiber, phone, cable, gas and electric lines.”

A cooperative and helpful locator service contractor made the hassles easier. Still, says Csanyi, “it was a dicey situation every time we had to grind a stump, remove or plant a shrub.”

As the final phase of the project is done the Valley Creek area sports a new, low-maintenance look. And #1 Landscaping has a template it can suggest to other HOAs that want to preserve property values in tough economic times.

“We are not doing things the way we did in the past,” Bostaph concludes. **LM**

Harler is a freelance writer in the Strongsville, OH. Contact him at curt@curtharler.com.



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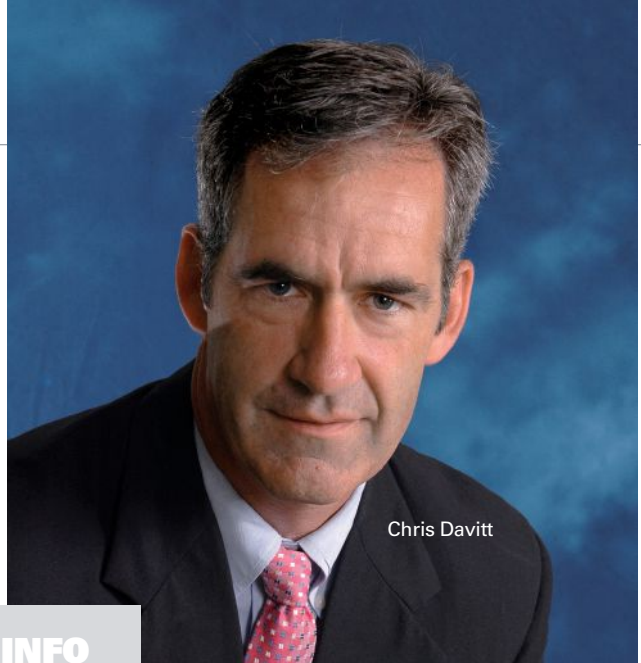
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Chris Davitt

Ruppert Landscape has come a long way since 1971, when Craig Ruppert launched the company in his garage. Ruppert Landscape president **Chris Davitt** has been active in the company since its nascence, when, as an 11-year-old, he helped Ruppert with the business on nights and weekends. Needless to say, Davitt has seen his share of changes at Ruppert and in the industry over the years. Today, he stops to talk to *LM* about what's shaping the maintenance business now.

TOP TRENDS

› **Sustainable landscape management.** It's got us all thinking about an area we didn't think about. We have to figure out ways to use fewer resources while keeping the image of the properties high. It's a new twist and a new challenge for the industry. On the sustainability side, we try to use fewer labor hours, to find a way to do the job more efficiently. We focus on making the best use of our resources.

› **Improved debris management.** If you can figure out what needs to be done and how to do it most efficiently, then the energy savings will come. Debris is expensive to move, and simple things like using mulching blades to avoid hauling away grass clippings leads to savings. Very often you can't dispose of debris on site. If the customer has a wooded area, you can use the leaves to mulch the wood line. Then you have a cleaner looking forest with less undergrowth. You're saving money, but you're also preventing pollution and saving energy.

TOP OBSTACLES

› **Tighter margins.** In a tough market like this, we're competing with tighter margins. We have to keep finding ways to meet our customers' needs and do it more cost effectively. Obviously if a customer's willing to spend more, it's a lot easier to make the job shine. If they want to reduce their budget, it makes it more of a challenge. Price, it appears, is the driving factor, but really value is the driving factor. Margin doesn't have to be reduced to provide good value. We need to be more innovative, we need to listen carefully to our customer's needs and by doing so, we can deliver on those needs by changing the project's scope. If there's innovation in equipment or in plant material, we need to

INSIDE INFO

Company: Ruppert Landscape

Headquarters: Laytonsville, MD

Employees: 600

2010 revenue: \$65 million

Key to being a maintenance leader: Ruppert attempts to create a company that inspires its people. A motivated, empowered field force is where the rubber meets the road. We strive to motivate our workforce in many different ways. This can be hard to do because of the many things that managers have on their plates, including selling work, keeping track of costs, managing vendors, etc.

With all we have to do, a manager is not always going to remember to smile, say thank you or ask an employee how they're feeling. That's why we do what we can to acknowledge them in a structured way, whether it be through birthday cards, barbecues, or award ceremonies.

Ruppert's best resources are its people. They're the ones who are going to figure out how to give our customers what they're looking for. We want them to look at each property and take ownership of it, to care about the property they're on. We're constantly taking the temperature of our employees to see how we're doing in the management of them. That's completely necessary if we are going to be a company that holds the bar high.

know about it, especially if that means producing more for less money.

› **Assuming we need to lower margins.** Our customers are talking about price more than ever, but people can sell based on relationships—and they can sell value, which is not always price. The company has to remind the business developers of that, because they're always hearing "price." When customers are saying "price," they usually mean value. To the extent they are talking price, that price doesn't have to come out of margin. With some creative thinking, it can perhaps come out of the scope of the project.

TOP OPPORTUNITIES

› **A talented industry workforce to choose from.** Finding industry talent is usually very difficult. But in a down economy, we have the opportunity to find top performers who are looking for work. We need to be aware of who's out there on the street, who's available. And if they can be put to use in our company, this is the time to make the investment in them.

› **Improving your fundamentals.** When customers are very focused on lower pricing, it may appear that they're making our job harder. But in reality, they're forcing us to ask the question "how can we incrementally improve costs?" We need to improve in small steps—whether it's trying to figure out how to save travel time, or picking up debris at the same time we're mowing. We need to start thinking about how to save minutes and how to save pennies, and over time that adds up to hours and dollars. By embracing the demands of the market and refining our critical thinking skills, we will not only be helping ourselves in the short term, we'll be helping ourselves overcome challenges that arise for years to come.



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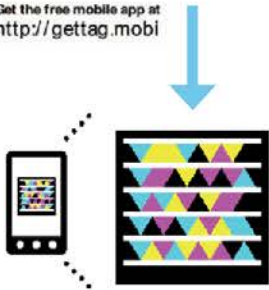
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LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT (ISSN 0894-1254) is published monthly (12 issues per year) by Questex Media Group LLC, 306 W Michigan St, Suite 200, Duluth, MN 55802. **Subscription rates:** one year, \$54, two years \$76 in the United States & Possessions; \$87 for one year, \$127 for two years in Canada and Mexico; all other countries \$165 for one year, \$246 for two years. For airmail delivery, include an additional \$75 per order annually. Single copies (pre-paid only): \$8 in the United States; \$10 in Canada and Mexico; \$15 all other countries. Back issues, if available: \$16 in the U.S.; \$20 in Canada and Mexico; \$30 all other countries. Add \$6.50 per order for shipping and handling. **Periodicals postage paid** at Duluth, MN 55808 and additional mailing offices. **POSTMASTER:** Please send address changes to *Landscape Management*, P.O. Box 1268, Skokie, IL 60076-8268. Canadian G.S.T. number: 840 033 278 RT0001. Publications Mail Agreement Number 40017597. Printed in the U.S.A.



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MYBIGGESTMISTAKE

LESSONS LEARNED THE HARD WAY » BY CASEY PAYTON



Though it's been in the family for decades, getting out of the nursery business was the right decision for Stephen Hillenmeyer.



Stephen Hillenmeyer

COMPANY: Stephen Hillenmeyer Landscape Services (and Weed Man franchise)

PRESIDENT: Stephen Hillenmeyer

HEADQUARTERS: Lexington, KY

SERVICE MIX: 20% landscape design/installation; 30% commercial maintenance; 30% equine maintenance; 20% Weed Man lawn care franchise

NUMBER OF EMPLOYEES: 60 full-time; 160 in peak season

2010 REVENUE: \$8 million

STEPHEN HILLENMEYER SAYS getting out of the nursery business and focusing his energy on lawn care was the right move. Though it meant a huge shift in the company's business model, the president of Stephen Hillenmeyer Landscape Services says the decision was easy.

Hillenmeyer acquired a Weed Man franchise in 2004, and he's shifted the entire business to focus largely on maintenance. Given the downturn in the economy, he says it was a wise move.

Hillenmeyer's decision was gutsy considering his family, through five generations, operated one of the oldest and most respected nursery operations in the country.

One owner, tighter focus

Over the years, Hillenmeyer had been in business with his two brothers (he's the youngest of nine siblings, including six sisters). But in time he bought them out. Today, it's just him running the show.

Hillenmeyer says the change allowed him to focus not only on what he's good at, but what made the most business sense — maintenance.

"It's important to look at the best business strategy for today, not what the strategy was 10

or 20 years ago," he says. "Things have changed dramatically. We'd been in the retail business and had a growing nursery, but from a business standpoint, I strongly felt it made more sense to look for more reoccurring revenue.

"I found that came from the maintenance side of the business. So that was the impetus for this big change — moving more toward maintenance and using landscape design as a complement to that."

More specialized now

"Even when the economy is bad, we're finding people still want to have their grass mowed and taken care of," says Hillenmeyer. "But those new installation jobs have come to a screeching halt. While we used to do a lot of larger projects, our entire focus has changed, and that's allowed us to withstand the downturn in the market."

Hillenmeyer says he's learned being leaner and specialized can be better than being big but unfocused.

"It's hard to be good at multiple things," he says. "If you decide you're going to not only do landscape maintenance but also irrigation, lighting, patios, decks, and more, you may find that you've become so diluted in expertise that you aren't truly an expert at all."

Focus on competencies

"I'm not saying to put all your eggs in one basket — some diversification is important. But reducing services to really concentrate on a core business is a smart move."

Hillenmeyer says he was able to make these changes without decreasing overall revenue.

"We decreased the amount of services we offered," he says. "Therefore in some cases we did less revenue. However, because we were more efficient we actually became more profitable."

"If you're doing so many things you might not be able to carefully watch what you're doing. Different segments of the market have different margins. A 40% margin in one market might be great but 40% in another could be a disaster. Now that we're in fewer markets we're able to focus on excelling in them."

Hillenmeyer says focus and having a plan is vital to success today.

"You can't stop marketing or advertising to your customers. You still have to maintain your game plan."

"Of course, if you're trying to be all things to all people, that's going to be hard. In really focusing your business you have less to concentrate on and are more able to react to what the market's like and continue to succeed — even when times are tough."

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



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