

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

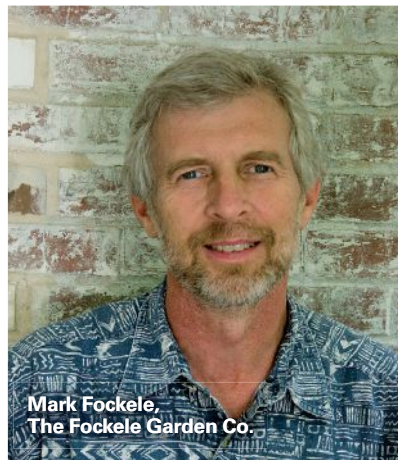
million in revenue in 2010 and growing about 10%. For 2011, the 90% commercial company is looking at being up another 15%.

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.

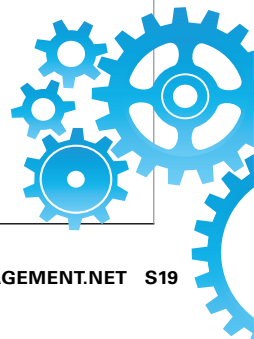
"Going back to the theory of maintaining our existing customer base rather than replacing them with newer, lower-

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**

