

At Peabody Landscape Group in Columbus, OH, community involvement is as integral to the company's success as self-sufficiency and customer satisfaction are.

"It's important to try to give back to your community," says company President **David Peabody**. "We don't realize how fortunate we are in the United States, for all of the things we have available to us."

Peabody Landscape Group has been involved in community service for more than 20 years, says Peabody, who enjoys supporting Boy Scouts of America service projects and often donates materials and equipment to them.

Peabody has a lot to say about the landscape maintenance business, and he took time to discuss with *LM* the pros and cons of what he's seeing in the industry today.

TOP TRENDS

› **Our design/build segment is growing.** Outdoor living is becoming a trendy thing. People are moving away from water features and focusing more on outdoor living and pondless water fixtures. People are steering away from the ponds because of the algae and the maintenance.

Outdoor grilling is becoming more fashionable as well, and there are more sit-up bars. The outdoor fireplace is a more trendy element than fire pits are these days, because it is a focal point of the landscape and it's more elegant. Lighting is something people are doing more of. You see more lighting on the front side of a home. There's an increasing focus on the architecture — enhancing the architecture through lighting. Probably 50% of our construction has become hardscape.

TOP OBSTACLES

› **Lowball bidders.** The industry is made up of anybody who wants to get away with something, who wants to make a buck. You're essentially competing with Billy the kid next door who's got a lawn mower. That's what this industry is compared to. There's a real misunderstanding from people who see Hispanics working for a landscape company. Their first thought is that the worker is an illegal alien, that he is being paid less than minimum wage, and that's not the case.



David Peabody

INSIDE INFO

Key to being a strong maintenance leader: Integrity. With both your clients and your employees you have to be honest, whether things are good, bad or indifferent. And you've got to treat people the way you want to be treated. Be fair in business. If you make a mistake, admit it and take care of it. Everybody makes mistakes, and a lot of people try to shirk their responsibility. But you have to admit it, correct it and move on.

It's also important to keep up with safety measures. And show professionalism, both within the company and outside the company. It's important to give back as much as you possibly can within the community.

Company: Peabody Landscape Group

Headquarters: Columbus, OH

Employees: 45 full-time (plus 130 part-time)

2010 revenue: \$6.1 million

Most landscape contractors are trying to provide quality. As far as those who provide unrealistically competitive prices, some property managers are finally starting to see what they've been getting, and they're not satisfied. They're looking to go back to some of the service contractors they've had in the past as a result.

› **Rising costs.** We've had increases in health insurance, and gasoline prices have gone up, both by 50%. Equipment and labor costs have gone up. Rent's gone up. So how can prices go down? It just doesn't make any sense.

TOP OPPORTUNITIES

› **We're becoming more self-sufficient.** We're on a parcel of ground that's on 22 acres, and we have 12 acres of shade and ornamental trees.

In all, we have about 3,500 trees. By growing the trees ourselves, we eliminate the need to buy them wholesale. Buying trees can be expensive, especially if I'm looking at a big project. It's less expensive to grow them, and then we use them in our bidding.

› **Alternative fuels.** There are huge opportunities for companies if they explore eliminating the normal resource of fuel and look at opportunities in alternative fuels, which we're doing now. Next year, we're looking to decrease fuel costs by around 50%. Decreasing those costs provides me with one more way to be more competitive. We have six trucks dedicated to delivering materials to job sites so we can keep our crews working on the property continuously. Keeping fuel costs down will really have an impact on our bottom line.