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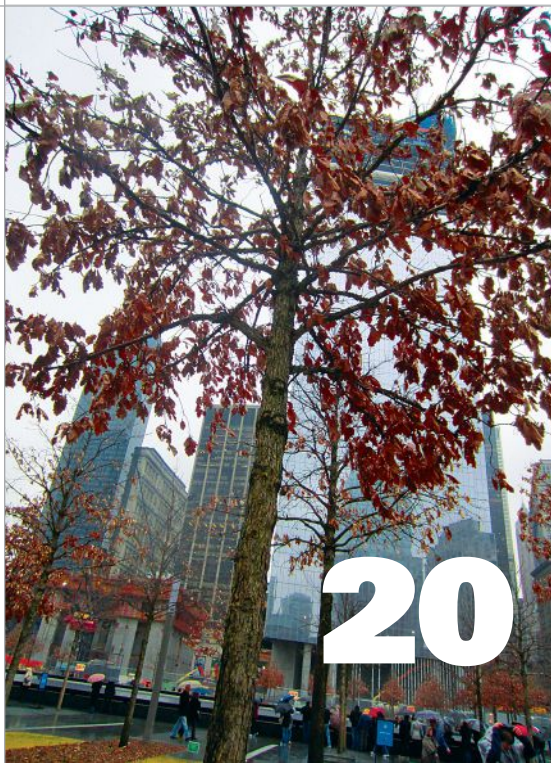


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VOL 51, ISSUE 4



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Providing beautiful, meditative and functional outdoor spaces to help a community center better serve its members

LM MARKET MATCH We've made your life a little easier by supplying icons that direct you to stories targeting your core business.

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THE LM DAILY

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» **Fred's Take: Rising fuel prices don't have to raise your blood pressure**

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WEBINAR

Were you able to attend our "Marketing to the Affluent" webinar series? In case you missed it, you can find the archived recordings here:

www.landscapemanagement.net/webinars



Pinterest OF THE MONTH

Caterpillar sends off a group visiting its Sanford, NC plant in style. View our posts at: pinterest.com/landscapemgmt

TWEET, TWEET

The Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) Day of Service program gives contractors an opportunity to give back to their communities. Follow our tweets: @landscapemgmt



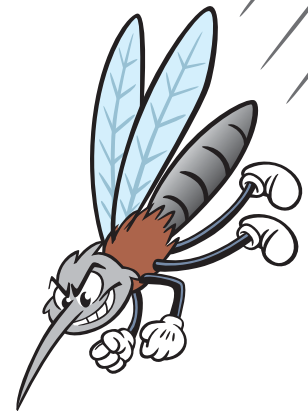
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NEWS+VIEWS

GREEN INDUSTRY EVENTS, TRENDS AND TIPS

Cat comes home

Manufacturing jobs are coming back to America.

Well maybe not in the droves that would put an end to unpleasant unemployment numbers, but at least one company, Caterpillar, is doing its part. The manufacturer of all types of construction

equipment, including a new line of Tier IV-ready skid steers, mini excavators, compact track loaders and multi-terrain loaders, announced in mid-February it will start building small-track type tractors and mini hydraulic excavators at a new plant in Athens, GA. Some 1,400 people will be employed at the new

plant when it's fully operational.

The new facility will be part of Caterpillar's Building Construction Products (BCP) Division, which is based in Cary, NC.

Earlier in the year Caterpillar launched its D-series of skid steers and compact track loaders. Caterpillar invited a gaggle of press members to its North Carolina facilities to get a look at the new models and enjoy a little "stick time."

According to the company, the new Tier IV ready machines offer increased fuel efficiency and productivity. For more information on the new products, visit your local Caterpillar dealer or the company's website: www.cat.com.



TROUBLE IN PARADISE

BY DAN JACOBS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Whenever you hear the words "mutual self destruction," you want to tread carefully. Tom Oyler, of the Wilson-Oyler Group, knew that many of the attendees of the Professional Landcare Network's (PLANET) Green Industry Great Escapes program would have a difficult time accepting his message.

"I'm wearing white, because I have a dark message," Oyler quipped as he took the stage to give his keynote presentation.

The content of Oyler's words were a sharp contrast to the relaxed surroundings of the event, held at the Atlantis Resort on Paradise Island in the Bahamas. But attendees weren't

there for just the fun and games.

Contractors are far too focused on their competitors and not enough on innovating, Oyler said. And while there is nothing wrong with eliminating waste, eking out a percentage point here and there is a temporary fix. Competitors — if they haven't already — will simply copy that approach and your advantage is gone. Doing something no one else can replicate is what will truly separate a company from its competitors.

And proving he's not all talk, Oyler said he's working with a company to bring a new way to manage staffing to blow away the competition.



One of thousands of fish in the Atlantis resort's numerous aquariums.

That carbureted engine in your ZTR is okay. And that's being generous. Generally speaking, it usually starts and doesn't give you too much trouble. At least that's what it wants you to believe. Fact is that little gold digger is secretly milking you for every penny in your piggy bank. And doing it with a smile.

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What we don't need to learn from Steve Jobs

Walter Isaacson's recent biography of Steve Jobs, the demanding former head of Apple, apparently doubles as a management guide for many executives. Some have even donned the deceased executive's trademark black turtleneck sweater.

I'm all for learning from others. I've had a number of bosses over the years, some good and some very, very bad. I nearly quit a job after receiving an email from one mid-level manager who reprimanded me for doing something that "wasn't my job." The problem was, it was my responsibility. It was a task given to me by his boss. Yet I nearly responded to the vicious, curt and overall demeaning tone of his email with a "four-letter" filled resignation letter. Fortunately, I allowed myself to calm down before hitting the send button. I used the delete button instead, but within a few months I chose to move on.

Jobs was known for his brusque, often intimidating style. He also possessed extraordinary talent and drive. My former mid-level manager seemed to share Jobs' natural "gift" for bullying. The problem was he didn't have Jobs' track record of success, nor had he earned the respect of those he regularly berated, something that Steve Jobs clearly had.

There's a danger in selectively picking and choosing certain traits to emulate. Jobs was effective not because he could bully people or because

he focused so intently on design or any other single trait for which he is so admired. It was the package, the complex and nuanced way all those traits melded together that allowed Jobs to succeed.

As Isaacson said (in an article in the *Wall Street Journal* discussing executives using his book as a management bible): "I hate when people say, 'I'm like Steve Jobs, I drive people to perfection.' I say, well, make sure you have his talents as well."

In other words, wearing black turtleneck sweaters and bringing employees to tears with a harsh and degrading demeanor isn't going to help you build your company.

I'm not suggesting there isn't something to learn from Jobs. Quite the contrary. He did some extraordinary things (that might be the understatement of the year) and had a vision and drive that surpassed the majority of executives. He was able to do what he did because of the unique makeup of his personality. Hijacking "pieces" of someone else's approach and simply dropping them like bombs on your employees will most likely have harmful effects.

My goal has been to adopt and apply the traits I most admire and eschew the ones that leave me feeling at best unappreciated or at worst abused. But to make them work, I must make them my own.

Trying to shoehorn Jobs' management style into your business will likely be about as effective as installing a Windows operating system onto your Macintosh computer. You might be able to make things run, but the two weren't created for each other. And why would you want change your approach in the first place? You created and built your business with your unique talents. You developed a team that has become accustomed to your management style and works well within it. There is always room to learn, adapt and grow. Chucking that aside and adopting the Jobs approach seems foolish — something Steve Jobs certainly wouldn't have done.

My goal has been to **adopt and apply the traits I most admire** and eschew the others.

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PROGRESS



Spreading the wealth

From push-alongs to ride-alongs, sprayers and spreaders have modernized with the times.

With the rise of chemical use and lush suburban landscapes, the 1950s facilitated the creation of the perfect lawn. By the 1960s and 1970s, that concept was a blossoming American obsession and the job of spreading plant food, lime and seed had become a necessity.

Since then, spreading and spraying via dusters, granular applicators, field sprayers and broadcast spreaders has become more sophisticated. When organics gained a solid foothold in the 1990s, topdressing applicators for compost teas and organic fertilizers became an integral part of the mix.

No one knows the evolution of spreaders better than Joseph Carrizales, sales, marketing and operations manager for White Castle's PSB division. Although White Castle is well known for its hamburgers, less known is its manufacturing of more than 3 million Scott's spreaders. "Our first drop spreaders were made from surplus WWII gun barrels, then to rotary, and finally to powered spreaders," Carrizales says.

Now, its high-end spreaders are made with stainless steel frames, fiberglass hoppers and plastic gears.

The mechanization of spreaders/sprayers also has grown in sophistication, based on modifications in large-scale agricultural machinery. "Our spreaders/sprayers started out as push-alongs, followed shortly after that by motorized walk-behind machines, and then stand-on-and-ride units, all by the late '90s," says Tom Jessen, president of PermaGreen Supreme. At the same time, L.T. Rich Products introduced its first ride-on spreader/sprayer.

Today's spreaders and sprayers offer more comfort and bells-and-whistles than early models did. PermaGreen's Triumph features ergonomic handlebars, fingertip controls, all-wheel braking, drop-down handles and more.

As contractors expand their businesses and bring on new people, it's more important than ever to make machines that are easy to operate and offer increased productivity, says Scott Kinkead, vice president at Turfco.

"Our new hands-free speed control makes operations easy," Kinkead says. "It reduces the learning curve and increases overall productivity."

L.T. Rich's Z-Spray offers its own set of luxuries. "We were one of the first zero-turn sprayers and spreaders on the market," says Sales Manager Andy Walters. "We incorporate a pressure gauge and a speedometer to ensure proper calibration. Our machines can even tell you the temperature outside and your average ground speed over the entire lawn. We are the only machine with a foam-marking system to allow you to see exactly what areas have been treated."

Topdressing, using organic topsoils and compost teas, is leaving its mark on the landscape industry, too. Once considered essential only in the maintenance of athletic fields and golf courses, it is now used on residential and commercial lawns.

And whereas topdressing used to be a cost-prohibitive option for smaller jobs, the advance of specialized spread-

ers/sprayers has changed that. Ecolawn president Daniel Cote says the invention of the Ecolawn Applicator topdressing machine helped bring smaller mechanical compost spreaders to new markets.

Tanks, tips and liquid pumps have become larger for high-volume organics. With the push for organics, leading spreader/sprayer manufacturers have adapted. "We are now offering different tip sizes and liquid pump sizes to accommodate the push towards organic fertilizers, compost teas and other products that require higher volumes," says L.T. Rich's Walters.

As fuel costs rise, spreaders/sprayers are becoming more fuel-efficient, and metering and guidance systems with LED light bars are gaining momentum.

Spreaders have come a long way from the days of the walk-behind drop spreaders of the 1950s.

So, operators can easily find the best routes to take and gauge the amount of treatments to spread or spray from area to area.

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PREPARING FOR AN INSECT INVASION



The winter of 2011-2012 was one of the warmest winters on record. While that might be a good thing to a lot of people, it means early pest pressure for trees and compressed treatment windows for applicators.

Why is it so warm?

Meteorologists at the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) say that because it is a La Niña year, the jet stream is farther north than usual. This means that the cold air we're accustomed to in the northeast United States has stayed even farther north than usual, creating warmer temperatures throughout the country. The same goes for precipitation — it's been a relatively dry winter, too.

The biggest variant in weather patterns is caused by the Arctic Oscillation (a natural seesawing of atmospheric pressure between the Arctic and mid-latitudes of the North Pacific and

An unusually warm winter means additional stress on trees from increased pest pressures.

BY JOSEPH DOCCOLA

North Atlantic Oceans). This year, it's been in its positive phase, which contributes to the warm weather.

What to expect this growing season

First off, expect an early start. Because the weather has been so consistently warm, the season likely will be pushed forward. Leaf and bud emergence, as well as pest activity, will occur sooner than usual.

An early spring season can jeopardize plants. With early bud break, trees are more susceptible to a cold snap or

being damaged in storms.

Consider the snowstorm that pounded the Northeast in October. Trees sustained severe damage from the weight of snow on full canopies, and those wounds are susceptible to wood-boring insects and canker disease.

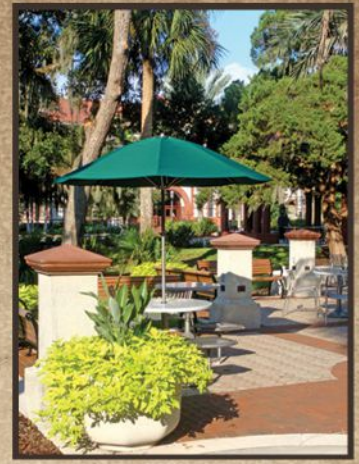
Cold winter temperatures have a significant effect on insect survival. Extreme temperatures reduce survival of overwintering pests. In the absence of cold, insect survival is favored. If temperatures remain mild, pest emergence will occur earlier than usual. With relatively mild temperatures and wet spring conditions, you can expect greater disease outbreaks as well.

What to do about it

In preparing for the season, be ready for an early start.

Local extension agents are a wealth of knowledge, so consult them. They offer helpful information about pest

continued on page 16



Permeable Clay Pavers...Beautiful and Sustainable

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Challenge...

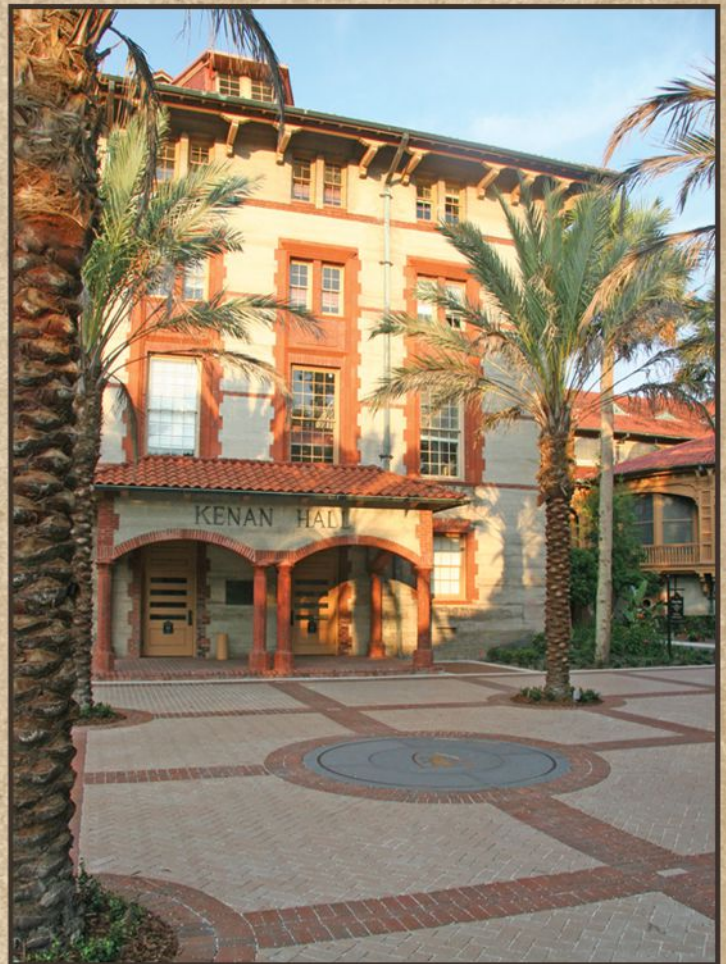
Water pooled up into ankle-deep mud directly in front of Kenan Hall At Flagler College each time it would rain. The City of St. Augustine didn't allow any new tie-ins to its storm sewer system and required all new construction to keep its storm drainage on site. Secondly, the design had to tie in with the historic nature of its surroundings.

Solution...

Pine Hall Brick StormPave® permeable clay pavers provide an effective way to drain away stormwater while at the same time, picking up colors of the nearby building - in line with local historic-district guidelines.

The 5,300-square-foot space has become a popular gathering spot for students.

The plaza is paved in gray as the primary color with autumn as the accent.



The Plaza at Kenan Hall/Flagler College in St. Augustine, Florida
Landscape Architect: Sharon Fowler of Hauber Fowler & Associates
Builder: A.D. Davis Construction
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BUG OFF

continued from page 14
emergence, often online.

Extension offices also can help you identify the phenological indicators of when to treat for common pests. For example, in New England, treatments for winter moth are applied when forsythia blooms.

As the season continues, if temperatures rise rapidly and stay elevated, expect overlap in insect emergences. That means treating for a number of pests early. Researchers have forecasted that areas with dry climates are likely to become drier and wet areas wetter.

Dry regions like Texas and the West can expect increased pressures from pine bark beetles and Ips beetles, which attack drought-stressed stands of trees. Pine sawyer beetles attack stressed trees, and vector pine wilt. Mites, more active in hot, dry weather, damage evergreens.

Wet areas such as the Northeast and Florida, on the other hand, can



expect an increase in foliar diseases such as anthracnose and insects such as whiteflies. In the upper Midwest, elm bark beetles can transmit Dutch Elm Disease. Expect earlier beetle flight, and earlier DED applications.

Many species of scale insects that infest trees and shrubs are most susceptible to treatment at the crawler stage. Crawler emergence and new leaf development usually are coordinated. Though hemlock trees develop later than many hardwoods, expect an early push of foliage this year. Treatment for elongate hemlock scale, for example, should be made earlier.

To manage all of this, check weather conditions and anticipate having to

The mild winter we've had is likely to bring higher populations of pests such as emerald ash borers (left) and whiteflies (right).

apply treatments early. Read all label instructions and dilution rates. Lastly, inject trees when soils are moist and have warmed in spring. In summer, inject trees early in the morning, when conditions are cooler. In dry conditions, water your trees before treating them.

Whatever the weather, by planning properly this season, we can prevail. **LM**

The author is an ISA-certified arborist and plant health care specialist with Arborjet and has more than 30 years' experience in the horticultural and arboricultural field.

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Lost and found: *Be willing to ask for help ... and use common sense*

A few years ago, I lost our son Jamie while I was looking for a new pair of jeans at a JCPenney store. After organizing a search party comprising just one increasingly frantic father, I decided the best course of action was to run around the department store like a mad man.

Failing to uncover a single trace of Jamie's whereabouts, after 10 minutes, I shelved my ego and asked for help. I came clean with one of the store's security guards. Shaking her head, the security guard sternly said, "Follow me."

I thought to myself: *I ran past this security guard a few times before I asked her for help. I understand her disappointment with me.*

Walking briskly, the security guard unclipped her colossal walkie-talkie, depressed the speak button and shouted "Code Adam! Code Adam!"

Then she turned to me and said, "We're closing off all entrances and exits." I felt reassured ... for a few seconds — until the word "exits" echoed in my ear. I'd never considered that option: the thought of Jamie wandering around the parking lot like a human pinball. My perspective and fear grew.

"We're walking to the mall entrance. We don't need to make this search any larger than it has to be."

Oh no! I forgot this store was attached to a mall. God help me! Please, please help us find Jamie!

En route to the mall entrance, the security guard made a pit stop at a cashier kiosk and grabbed a clipboard with a form and a pen.

"What color shirt is your son wearing?" the security guard asked.

"Blue, I think. Maybe black, gray or green. Something dark for sure ... I think." The security guard shook her head, further disappointed.

"Pants?"

"Yes, he has pants on — or at least he did when I last saw him." ... Just kidding. That's not what I said, but it is a line a wisecracking neighbor interjected when I shared this story with him.

"Jamie's wearing black or blue sweatpants, I think," I told the security guard.

Then, out of nowhere, I demonstrated the gift of common sense. I believe it was God doing for me what I couldn't do for myself.

Oh my God! I'm sitting on a gold mine of information! All I have to do is share these four nuggets and we'll find Jamie in seconds.

"Jamie has glasses, red hair, Down Syndrome and a stuffed fake snake around his neck that he likes to shake," I proudly offered.

But this by-the-book security guard didn't write down, or share with her coworkers via walkie-talkie, even one of those nuggets — clearly just because we hadn't gotten to that part of the form.

I wanted to scream, "You must be kidding! You're not going to share these nuggets with the entire world? But my cell phone vibrated just then. It was my wife, Bridgid. She no doubt wondered where Jamie and I were. I didn't have the heart (or guts) to take the call and tell her I had lost Jamie.

For a split second, I imagined bargaining with the security guard: *You find me a kid with red hair, Down Syndrome or a stuffed snake, and I'll take him home and fool the wife until we find the real deal.*

Thankfully, better thoughts prevailed. A few minutes later, someone found Jamie. He was "hiding" in the women's dressing room.

This month's take-home lessons:

1. Never be afraid to ask for help;
2. Common sense isn't so common; and
3. Jamie clearly is much brighter than his Old Man and the by-the-book security guard.



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T A N D I N G A L L

The 9/11 Memorial's urban forest is rooted in much more than soil.



It's raining in Lower Manhattan. It's a cold rain, the kind that makes you want to stay in bed. Yet at the 9/11 Memorial, visitors are pouring into the outdoor plaza just as steadily as the drops above. They have far more important things to think about: their loved ones. Some visitors gaze, mesmerized, upon the memorial's two waterfalls. With their fingers, others gently trace the names of family and friends whose names are carved here. 🍀 Across the plaza, Wayne Dubin, 52, sports a short gray beard, a red and black windbreaker and khaki pants. The vice president and division manager at Bartlett Tree Experts has worked in the tree care business for 23 years. He knows his trees. 🍁 The veteran arborist looks out at the rushing water and the landscape beyond. He sees the two one-acre voids where the World Trade Center once stood. And he's acutely aware of the thousands of victims' names emblazoned in bronze before him. 🍀 "The trees bring life to the plaza," he says weightily. *"The trees bring life to the plaza."* On the burial ground of nearly 3,000 people, that life means a lot. ▶

PHOTOS BY: BETH GERACI

BY BETH GERACI SENIOR EDITOR



STILL STANDING

► *After its miraculous recovery, the Survivor Tree continues to thrive and inspire.*

Stories about heroism and hope on 9/11 abound. But perhaps none is more inspiring than the well-known story of the Survivor Tree.

The pear tree was the only thing to be found alive in the World Trade Center rubble. It was crushed at the bottom of the pile. But it was alive.

Ten years later, the Survivor Tree holds a special place at the 9/11 Memorial.

“That tree represents the strength of New Yorkers,” said Wayne Dubin, who is responsible for the tree’s day-to-day maintenance.

“There were multiple opinions as to whether the Survivor Tree should be on the plaza,” recalled Mark Merit, chief operating officer of Environmental Design, which was deeply involved in restoring, transporting and installing the Survivor Tree at the 9/11 Memorial. “Ron Vega is the godfather of the Survivor Tree. Without his personal ‘I’m going to make this happen,’ that tree would not have been on the plaza.”

Vega, the 9/11 Memorial’s director of design, was deeply involved in the 9/11 recovery efforts from the very beginning. One day on the pile, he heard about the tree’s discovery, and he never forgot it.

Years later, when the 9/11 Memorial was in the planning stages, “I remembered about the Survivor Tree. I remembered about this legend, this story about a tree coming out of the debris field,” he said in an interview with the Discovery Channel. “And on a site that had so much death, this was the one breath of life that came out of it. I had to make sure that we had a place for it on the plaza.”

The tree was badly injured. For nine years, the New York City Parks Department nursed it back to health at Brooklyn’s Van Cortlandt Park. The efforts were going well. Until, that is, 2010, when a major wind storm blasted the East Coast.

Again, the Survivor Tree was knocked over. Its future looked grim.

“When it blew over, it cracked all the roots on one side of it,” said Merit, whose team got involved with the tree’s restoration after that storm. “It had a compromised root system, a very tricky operation.”

But the team brought in equipment to right the tree and cultivate the root system. Within nine months, it was sprouting new growth.

In the end, Environmental Design transported the 25,000-pound load to the 9/11 Memorial and lowered it into its honorary spot.

Today, the Survivor Tree is in full bloom. — BG

For them

“The project’s a huge, huge emotional and physical success,” says Ron Vega, the memorial’s director of design and construction. “It’s healing for everybody who comes, the victims’ families especially. Those who have no proof of death, this is their final resting place. And when people come to visit, they feel like it’s the place they have to come to say goodbye.”

Vega serves as the liaison between the memorial’s owner, consultants and construction teams, overseeing the 9/11 Memorial project.

“He’s the band on the deck of the Titanic,” Dubin says of Vega. “He just keeps playing.”

It’s no wonder. Vega is immersed in the 9/11 Memorial, professionally, emotionally and physically. And he never loses sight of its mission.

“The only reason I got involved was to help people have a place to say ‘goodbye’ to their loved ones,” he says. “I just met someone who lost her husband in the attacks, and you would have thought it was just yesterday. She was so appreciative.”

Shade and solace

It’s the people — both those who live on and those who live only in memory — who make the project so special, says Dubin, who is charged with overseeing the care of the more than 400 swamp white oak trees that are part of the 9/11 Memorial. “It’s an honor to in some small way be involved in paying tribute to all the people who lost their lives, and their families trying to cope with a loss that is very hard to reconcile.” Trees were not in
continued on page 25

Ron Vega insisted that the Survivor Tree occupy a special place at the memorial.





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Swamp white oak trees rise between the 9/11 Memorial and the future entry of the 9/11 Museum (above); Visitors walk among the trees last fall (left).

continued from page 22

the original plans for the memorial. But when the landscape architects at Berkeley, CA-based Peter Walker and Partners (PWP) joined the memorial's designer, Michael Arad, during the final design stage, they insisted on the trees to provide shade on the scorching plaza.

Since then, the trees have come to embody far more than a plot of land. They signify renewed life in a place left jarringly bereft of it.

Ultimately, the landscape architects' design calls for 416 custom-grown mature trees at the memorial. So far, 225 swamp white oaks have been planted there, and another 191 will join them by next year's end.

The trees will spread laterally, and

over the next 10 years, the branches will spread to touch each other. "You'll get a full tree canopy, so you'll come here and there'll be some relief from the sun," Dubin says.

The landscape architects mandated that the trees' leaves be 10 feet off the ground — high enough for visitors to walk beneath. They also wanted the trees to be uniform in height and have top growth. That meant the trees had to be pruned excessively.

"There was *a lot* more to these before we did such aggressive elevation work," Dubin says.

But despite the hard work, "the trees aren't the focus here," Dubin says, his voice rising. "The memorial is the focus. We're here for the trees." He points behind him to the names carved in the memorial. "But *that's* the focus. I don't think people think for a second about what goes into it."

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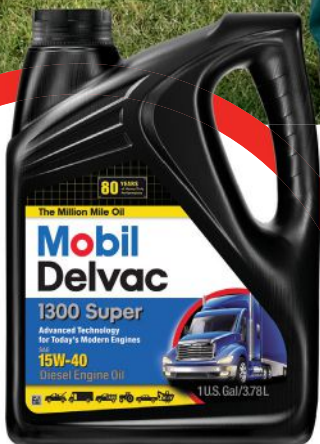
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continued from page 25

A special motivation

In fall 2006, it was business as usual for the folks at Environmental Design, a 35-year-old, Houston-based tree moving company that has built its reputation on efficiently moving trees everywhere from the United States to Australia.

Business as usual, that is, until Environmental Design Chief Operating Officer Mark Merit got word: The 9/11 Memorial tree contract was theirs.

What was special, Merit says, is “what you felt when you were out working on it. A lot of people involved in the 9/11 Memorial were first responders. A lot of folks you deal with in the Port Authority are people who lost almost all their coworkers. So you run into people who aren’t just there to do a job. They’re there because they have a personal stake in it.”

Environmental Design is responsible for the trees from when they arrived in late 2006 until they’ve been on the plaza for two years.

The company partnered with Bartlett Tree Experts on the project so Environmental Design could focus on moving the trees and Bartlett on maintaining them.

Any way, any how

Merit was keeping his cool. He had just learned the streets surrounding the memorial — the same ones Environmental Design planned to use to crane the trees down — offered little or no access to the site.

“The crane areas got designed out along the way,” Merit says nonchalantly. The original plan “just didn’t happen. It made for fun, that’s for sure.”

To compensate, Environmental Design custom built a transporter to drive trees onto the plaza. The com-

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Quentin Hastings, owner-operator,
Hastings Landscaping – Bristow, VA

Q: What kind of landscaping do you do?

Hastings: We specialize in residential and commercial landscaping all over Northern Virginia. In the winter, we also plow snow, mostly commercial properties with large parking lots.

Q: What kind of equipment do you use to run your business?

Hastings: We have six heavy-duty diesel pickup trucks, a large dump truck, eight lawn mowers, nine trailers and a Bobcat excavator.

Q: What are the most important factors that have contributed to your success?

Hastings: I am very diligent when it comes to maintaining my equipment. I check the fluids and tire pressures every day, wash the trucks every week, and, just like my father recommended, I always use Mobil Delvac to protect my equipment no matter what season.



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COVER STORY

plicated project took nine weeks to complete, but the company was willing to do anything to make the memorial's opening a success.

"That was an important day for everybody," Merit says.

Owning it

"Look at this tree," Dubin says. He's pointing to a slight discoloration near the base of its trunk. "Two days before the opening, somebody ran into this tree with a rolling cart, tore off a huge section of bark."

Bartlett rushed to repair it, "and I'd say 99% of the people walk by and never even notice this happened," Dubin says proudly. "Nobody's going to notice that."

Except Dubin, who notices every detail about the trees. He feels a deep responsibility for all of them.

"These are my trees," he exclaims.



"I'm taking care of 'em. Leave 'em alone. It's a tough enough environment without any help, or hindrance."

Given the deep sentiment behind the memorial, the pressure to keep the trees healthy is immense.

"Make them all do well. Don't let any of them die. Under any circumstances. Ever," Dubin says.

"Let's say for example this tree right here died," he continues, crouching down to the base of the tree. "They'd

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Environmental Design workers load two swamp white oak trees onto a flatbed truck at the New Jersey holding yard (left); The team lowers a tree down onto the 9/11 Memorial to be planted (above).

have to pull up all this stone work. They'd have to disconnect the irrigation system. And then they'd have to figure out some way to get a piece of equipment in here — because this tree weighs about 30,000 pounds — and pull this one out. And put a new one in. It would cost tens of thousands of dollars just to replace one tree.”

Underground

“There is pretty much irrigation underneath everywhere you walk when inside the memorial grounds,” says Kelco Landscaping and Construction manager Jeff Sausele, who oversaw the memorial irrigation project.

That's because the memorial is actually a 6-foot-tall rooftop garden, built atop the 9/11 Museum and a train station more than 70 feet below street level.

An unprecedented 30 miles of irriga-

tion pipes run through the property, and more than 40,000 tons of soil lie buried beneath the plaza to sustain the trees' growth well into the future.

“Rooftop irrigating is based on trying to use as small an amount of water as needed for the landscaping to survive,” Sausele says. “99% of it is done with drip irrigation. That irrigation drip pipe is all over the site... underneath everywhere the public walks in the memorial.”

The water used to irrigate the plaza comes from harvested rainwater captured in tanks underground. It's regulated by two smart controllers — one for the north pool and one for the south pool.

Kelco, known for its high profile landscaping contracts around New York, also is responsible for the plaza's landscape maintenance. But it's the extensive irrigation system that is most crucial to the memorial's ecological health.

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COVER STORY



In warmer months, the swamp white oak trees on the memorial's large plaza bring a lushness to the site (above); Jeff Sausele of Kelco Landscaping (right) and his foreman, Mike Keller, oversaw the memorial's irrigation project.



With various teams striving to meet the same deadline for the memorial's 10-year anniversary opening, the site "was a controlled chaos" for Sausele and his 11-person team.

"There were no staging areas, so material needed to be brought in weekly," Sausele says. "The fact that most of my pipes are in 3-foot tunnels throughout the whole site, it was just a tough, crowded work site that had no room for error, and that deadline of 9/11/11 was not changing."

Behind the scenes

It's about an hour's drive from downtown New York to the holding yard in Millstone Township, NJ, a rural area 55 miles southwest of New York City. The township is rich in history, having served as a covert outpost for the Continental Army during the Revolutionary War.

Dubin turns onto a winding road

PHOTO BY: JOE WOOLHEAD (MAIN); JEFF SAUSELE



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that cuts through farmland, draped in the day's mist. His is the only car on the two-lane road.

When we finally pull into the 12-acre holding yard, we're greeted by the striking sight of 240 swamp white oak trees, each held in its own 7-and-a-half-foot by 9-foot yellow pine box, encased in white insulation.

Merit knows the sight well. After all, he and his team built it. The trees are grown in boxes to ensure their root systems stay intact as the trees are transported to and installed at the memorial.

Environmental Design began building the nursery in March 2007, loading onto flatbed trucks trees from New York, Maryland and Pennsylvania in tribute to the places where the attacks took place.

"We moved all told close to 600 trees into that nursery and there was not a single problem," Merit says proudly.



The sight of the more than 200 trees at the holding yard is "eye-popping," Wayne Dubin says.

place," he explains. "You get this 'aha' moment and you

Completing the picture

At the far end of the plaza stands a chainlink fence. Beyond it, cranes rise into the air and construction workers are engrossed in building out the plaza. A jackhammer pounds nearby, but the soothing gush of the memorial's waterfalls mutes the noise.

The makeshift entrance where visitors enter the memorial today was never intended to be an entrance at all, Vega says. "The true intention of the design is that you go through the museum first and then finally get to know the people who have it as their last resting

open up to the authentic original."

Despite the ongoing work, the plaza has come a long way from its beginning, when every square inch of it was filled with gravel, concrete, rebar, dirt and tool storage.

"We still have another two acres to build," Vega says. "But it's so beautiful, you don't realize you're coming in through the bathroom window. That's the success of it. You get to experience all the victims' names and hear the rustling of the trees and the rushing of the water. It's a tremendous accomplishment." **LM**

PHOTO BY: BETH GERACI



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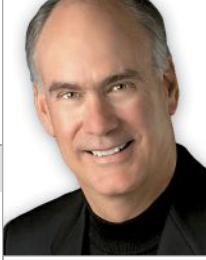
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FRANK ROSS

The author, owner-manager of 3PG Consulting, is a 45-year industry veteran. Reach him at fross@questex.com.

Beat the market with new resolve

For most of us, 2011 was challenging. The economy continued to be sluggish. Businesses struggled with rising fuel and labor costs against declining prices. New construction in many arenas was non-existent. Cash flow tightened. For many, it was a matter of hanging on tight and riding out the storm.

The economy remains sluggish. Unemployment in the construction field is more than 16%. Fuel costs are expected to hit record highs. Credit is more difficult than ever to obtain. And how many more years can we keep telling our people “no” to bigger paychecks?

Let’s quit crying in our beers and realize we’re in control. We can overcome the market and this economy, but we must realize we need to make changes in how we do what we do. That means *improve*. We need to look at every aspect of our business and ask, “How can I improve this process?” Lead generation, the sales process, pricing, job productivity, job tracking, accuracy and timeliness of financial information, cash flow, updating our business model and our business plan, training ... the list goes on.

My challenge to each of us is take control, make improvements and beat this market at its own game, which brings me to some resolutions.

I pledge:

- 1 I will become a better manager of my financial goings-on**, understand my financial position and manage my cash flow more effectively.
- 2 I will install an estimating system**, so no matter who estimates the job, the price will be the same.
- 3 I will develop a pricing strategy** that will balance what the market will bear against what I need to make a fair profit.
- 4 I will track job performance daily** so the people who can really make a difference (my crew leaders) will take ownership of their work.

5 I will cost every job so I know where I’m making money and can make improvements in the areas where I’m not.

6 I will generate timely financial reports focused on providing information I desperately need to manage my company: sales reports updated weekly, with the status of every open proposal; P&L statements by profit center by the fifth of the following month showing where I’m making money and where I’m not; job productivity reports weekly, if not daily; schedules of aged accounts receivable and payable; cash position reports weekly; budgetary projections, updated for current market conditions, etc.

7 I will prepare an intelligent and insightful budget that will serve as my road map for the challenges I’m facing this year.

8 I will control my cash flow to enhance the liquidity of my company, obtain deposits on jobs, collect money in less than 30 days, create a just-in-time mentality for inventory control, sell equipment we’re not using, renegotiate my bank loan portfolio for better terms (consolidation/lower interest/longer term) and strive to become debt-free by a specific deadline.

9 I will maximize the capacity of the people in my organization, to inspire them to perform beyond expectations, compensate them fairly, keep the pipeline packed with fresh young talent, train and retrain and create an energized environment where all of my people can grow professionally and financially.

10 I will develop my marketplace so I’m king in my geographic area; provide the best service at the best value; and never have my crews drive past a property we should be maintaining.

Once I master these, my challenge will be to create 10 more, and 10 more after that, because I know the only way I will beat this economy and stay ahead of the game is to continuously improve.



AT A GLANCE

NAME: Danny, Gordon, Jessica Milligan

COMPANY: Strathmore Landscape

YEAR FOUNDED: 1960s

YEARS IN THE INDUSTRY: 40-plus

INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT: Members of ASHOQ (Quebec Ornamental Horticulture Association) and CNLA Certification Committee

EDUCATION: Very little formal education. Lots of learning at industry conferences and seminars

HOBBIES: DM: Reading, walking; JM and GM: Crossfit; All 3: Family vacations

FAMILY: Danny is married to Cathy, and together they have 6 children. They also have one granddaughter, Jessica's daughter, Mia.

WEBSITE: pslc.ca/

Danny Milligan, president of Strathmore Landscape, is proud of the company's latest environmental initiative.

"We cannot change from gas-powered trucks completely, but we are moving in the direction of sustainability one step at a time."

Milligan, along with daughter **Jessica** and son **Gordon**, talked a little bit about how the industry has changed over the years and how business is different in America's northern neighbor.

How did you get into the industry? Danny's father Elmer did landscaping when Danny was a child. Danny helped him. Elmer opened a garden center and Danny started taking planting jobs for garden center customers when he was 17. Gordon joined the company while he was still in high school and Jessica started in 2004.

What makes your company unique? Our clients don't simply need a contractor; they need us to be their eyes and ears for their building's exterior appearance. We offer them proactive, professional management.

Tell us about your electric vehicle. Strathmore launched Québec's only zero-emissions landscape maintenance team in April 2011. This team of skilled horticultural technicians drive Québec's first privately owned Goupil electric vehicle. This compact truck

can operate for a full week on a single electrical charge.

The zero-emissions team does not use gas-powered tools. Their work is done by hand or with professional-grade battery-powered tools. All green waste is composted and used to enrich acres of local topsoil.

Do you have challenges in Canada that your American counterparts don't face? Herbicide restrictions in the past five years. We've adapted our systems and processes to focus more on total lawn health, preventative rather than reactive treatments.

Can you describe your market and your customers? Urban commercial properties and suburban shopping/life-style centers. We work with property managers who are focused on balancing their budgets while maintaining an excellent exterior image.

To what do you attribute your 100% retention rate in 2010?

We don't wait for customers to tell us there's a problem. We partner with the customer and propose upgrades and improvements, establish long-term plans and budgets and participate actively in the success of their building.

What is your strategy for growth? We focus on what we can be the best at. Any new growth has to be in line with our budget and has to be done systematically. Instituting standardized work practices has allowed us to grow quickly and profitably with very little stress.

What's the best part of your job? DM: Touring jobs after the flowers are planted. GM: Being outside. JM: Seeing our employees succeed at work and in life.

What is the most significant moment in your business career? Writing our value statement together with the employees and then turning it into a living document that guides our daily decisions and practices.

“ WE RECOGNIZE THAT OUR CLIENTS DON'T SIMPLY NEED A CONTRACTOR; THEY NEED US TO BE THEIR EYES AND EARS FOR THEIR BUILDING'S EXTERIOR APPEARANCE. — JESSICA MILLIGAN

PROJECT PORTFOLIO

A SCRAPBOOK OF DESIGN/BUILD OVERHAULS

Building Community

THE MISSION

Provide beautiful, meditative and functional outdoor spaces to help a community center better serve its members.

As one of nearly 100 subcontractors on this \$33 million project, the DeSantis Landscape team was continually faced with coordination, scheduling and logistics challenges. But as President Dean DeSantis notes, “We are proud to say that we have become the general contractor’s landscape contractor of choice, based on our performance on this unique project.”

The 10-acre landscape, which surrounds a 92,000-sq.-ft., LEED Silver-certified, multi-functional community center, was completed in two phases over a period of approximately a year. The project involved the procurement and installation of nearly 35,000 plants and trees.

“The first phase included the irrigation, bioswale construction and planting and large lawn areas around the perimeter,” DeSantis says. “The second phase included the entry water feature; prayer garden and water feature; amphitheater; entry pavers; ‘turtle back’ stone feature and swale; and the planting and irrigation around the exterior of the building.”

The entry water feature consists of four boulders, each weighing between 25 and 40 tons. They were hand-selected by DeSantis and landscape architect Christopher Freshley from a mountainside in the Columbia River Gorge. A stone artist was then brought in to bore and cut the stones before they were loaded and trucked to the project site.

DeSantis credits three suppliers in particular who helped his team significantly with this project: Hunter Industries, John Deere Landscapes and the Andrusko Group.



PHOTOS COURTESY: SALVATION ARMY RAY AND JOAN KROC CORPS COMMUNITY CENTER

THE WORK

1 | Show and shell. What became known as the “turtle back” stone feature courses through a swale and planting bed near the front entry. “It is a unique feature of dry-set, three- to five-inch-thick stones laid in a rolling pathway that creates a fun element for children and adults to walk through the landscape,” says DeSantis.

2 | Making an entrance. Behind the boulder water feature at the center’s entry are 30-ft.-tall specimen *Acer circinatum*, dug from a local, native forest.

3 | Bould over. The two water feature boulders have 2-in. bores intercepted by 36-in. cross cuts to create a weir. All the paver work was also completed by DeSantis Landscapes.

4 | Sewer soother. The parking lot swales were constructed using these round rock “dams” to slow stormwater as it passes through, using phytotechnology to cleanse the water before entering the sewer system. Also, curb cuts throughout the parking lot direct stormwater to the swales for filtering.

5-6 | Tranquil space. The prayer garden’s water feature is a mortared stack wall. The team was charged with keeping the water from running horizontally across the stones and directed into the basin. The solution? “All of the stones had to be laid at a slight canter,” DeSantis says, “while maintaining a nice horizontal stack line.”

DeSantis Landscapes is a family-owned, nationally recognized landscape company with offices in Salem and Portland, OR. Projects range from commercial properties and large private estates to intimate residential gardens. This project garnered a 41st Annual Environmental Improvement Grand Award from the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). For more information, visit DeSantisLandscapes.com.



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CROWFOOTGRASS

Dactyloctenium aegyptium

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This bunch-type summer annual is commonly found in sandy soils.
- ▶ Stems bend and root at the lower nodes, and have a spreading, creeping structure.
- ▶ Leaf blades and sheaths are without hair. Leaf margins have long, stiff hairs at the base.
- ▶ The flower head has two to seven spikelets at the tip of the stem.
- ▶ Its seed head resembles a crow's foot, and each plant may produce up to 60,000 seeds.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Properly mow, water and fertilize lawn to encourage healthy growth and minimize thin turf.
- ▶ This species can be invasive and is a prolific seed producer. Appropriately labeled pre-emergent herbicides are the most effective method of control.

* State restrictions on the sale and use of Dimension specialty herbicide products apply.



Recommended
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JAPANESE STILTGRASS

Microstegium vimineum

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This summer annual, also known as Mary's grass, resembles bamboo.
- ▶ Its leaves are pale green, lance-shaped and asymmetrical with a shiny mid-rib.
- ▶ Slender stalks of tiny flowers are produced in late summer, and dry fruits (achenes) are produced shortly afterward.
- ▶ It spreads by seeds and rooting at joints along the stem. Seeds produced by this plant can remain viable in the soil for at least three years.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ For non-selective control of established Mary's grass, glyphosate can be used. There are limited choices for complete post-emergent control of this species in established turfgrass.
- ▶ Mary's grass is identified as a class C noxious weed in some areas, so preventing the germination and establishment of it is critical. Apply a pre-emergent herbicide in early spring prior to germination.

For more information regarding these and other turf weeds — and related control technologies and tips — please visit www.DowProvesIt.com or call 800/255-3726.

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



BEST PRACTICES

BRUCE WILSON

The author, of the Wilson-Oyler Group, is a 30-year industry veteran. Reach him at bwilson@questex.com.

Let's fix the cracks in your foundation

Last month I laid out the six pillars necessary to create a strong foundation. Now, here's how to fix what's broken.

1 Solid financial base: Improve cash position by understanding ratios. The first step in solving restricted cash flow problems is to regularly track two key balance sheet ratios: *Quick Ratio*, an indicator of a company's short-term liquidity to meet operating needs (current assets minus inventories divided by current liabilities) and *Current Ratio* (current assets divided by current liabilities).

- › Cost cutting can help build cash, but cash management is equally important.
- › Stay on top of your receivables: strive for an average age of receivables of under 30 days.
- › Bill in advance for maintenance contracts versus billing at the beginning of the month for the current month's service.
- › Do not make cash distributions until your current ratio is in the safe zone.

Healthy *Debt-to-Equity Ratio*: This is a ratio of debt to owner's equity. A debt to equity ratio of over 2 for a maintenance company is considered too high and will limit your ability to gain access to credit.

- › Have a clear plan for paying down debt.
- › Consider leasing rather than taking loans out to finance equipment.

2 Maintain a good business mix. A diversified business mix will strategically position your organization for lasting results and ensure regular revenue streams throughout the year.

- › Track your business mix annually.
- › Measure the profitability of each type of business (construction, maintenance, etc.) and each customer segment (commercial, residential, etc.)
- › Develop a targeted sales approach that keeps you in balance.
- › Apply sales incentives in segments of business that you want to grow to achieve balance.

3 Make a commitment to learning. Having the ability to adapt, change and transform your company in response to shifting market preferences will enable you to remain competitive.

- › Hire a good cross-section of talent.
- › Encourage debate and dialogue.
- › Provide continual learning opportunities for your employees.
- › Conduct regular reviews when things do not go as expected, either favorably or unfavorably.
- › Keep the 'blame game' out of your company.

4 Be decisive. Empower managers to lead, be objective and think on their feet.

- › Make meetings count, have an agenda and keep minutes. Hold people accountable.
- › Move procrastinators out or to positions where they do not kill the decision making process.
- › Reflect on the future and quickly take advantage of opportunities.

5 Inspire talent: Commit to learning. If you don't have enough management candidates to meet growth demands:

- › Recruit interns and new graduates to develop a pipeline of new talent.
- › Develop a mentoring culture that inspires engagement.
- › Reward people with promotions if they have trained a replacement.

6 Customer focus. Keep an eye on customers' preferences. You'll grow your business and improve customers' experiences.

- › Evaluate process changes for their effect on your present and future customers.
- › Ask your customers for advice.
- › Learn more about your customers and what's trending. If you know their problems, you can offer solutions.

LM REPORTS

YOUR GUIDE TO PRODUCT RESEARCH

DESIGN BUILD: LIGHTING

Schröder Lighting US

Featuring a perforated mask design, new Boreal luminaires' decorative style is inspired by translucent paper lanterns. Laser cut, brushed stainless steel exterior shades can be complemented with optional dichroic filters to create colorful effects. Available in single- or twin-light configurations, IP66-rated fixtures measure 33.1 in. tall x 24 in. dia. They have an internal metal halide CDM lamp module, and use 70-, 100- and 150-W ED17 lamps. *Schreder.us*



Acuity Brands

New Tersen Ratio 1.5 is a contemporary styled luminaire supporting 48 LED diodes that produce illumination equivalent to a traditional 175-watt metal halide lamp. Its stylistic, "finned" shape serves as a heat sink as well as an architectural statement, making it ideal for outdoor parking lots, walkways and mixed-use applications. The luminaire achieves a 50,000-hour life at 1,000 MA with 70% lumen maintenance. *AcuityBrands.com/outdoor*



Bulbrite

New Eco Halogen A19 bulbs are compliant with EISA 2012 incandescent general service standards, and are ideal for use in outdoor and security lights. The energy-saving bulbs are available in clear and soft white, and in the equivalents of 40-, 60-, 75- and 100W incandescent. *Bulbrite.com*



Cooper Lighting

Lumière offers a variety of surface, wall and tree mounting accessories. All are equipped with a standard 0.5-in. NPS threaded mounting hole to accept fixtures with 0.5-in. NPS threaded stems. Made from die cast aluminum or stainless steel, they are available in several finishes, including black, bronze, white and more. *CooperLighting.com*



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T38-081-001 (03/12) BR 010-60782 DATOTURF1075



Holophane

GranVille II LED luminaires feature a new optical design that provides HID light levels while creating a comfortable, wholly luminous appearance with low glare, less uplight and less light trespass. Multiple lumen packages are available, and fixtures may be ordered

with asymmetric or symmetric distributions. The luminaires are optimized to meet existing light standards. A dedicated thermal management system maximizes performance and reliability. The period-style fixtures are also designed for easy access to the electronic driver to simplify maintenance. They include cast aluminum housing available in multiple styles, including two utility series and four standard housings. The fixtures are offered with traditional GranVille trim options and mount to industry standard pole tenons and existing locations. Holophane.com/LED/GV2



Orbit Industries

The new LET/LVT Series of compact electronic transformers for low voltage landscape lighting can be installed indoors or outdoors. It includes various options, such as a dimming loop, potentiometer and grounding wire. Models are available in an operational range from 10W to 300W. The transformers are "cool running," offering efficiency and reliability. A patented auto heat regulator automatically provides overload protection, dimming the output voltage if the system accidentally overheats (194°F). This ensures more dependability when compared to systems that terminate the light completely. The LET/LVT Series is also dimmable without producing any acoustic noise, which may occur with older systems. OrbitElectric.com

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WAC Lighting

Designed with architectural aesthetics and performance in mind, the new energy-efficient LEDme Step Lights offer a sleek profile and enhanced functionality for safety and style on indoor and outdoor stairs, walls and other pathways. The lights are offered in versatile, horizontal and circular scoop designs for a clean, seamless installation without any visible hardware. Easy to retrofit on to a single-gang, rectangular-style junction box, these luminaires offer a wide beam angle for broad lighting distribution, and deliver balanced, consistent lighting free of shadows and glare. Constructed with a cast aluminum body, the lights can be dimmed with an ELV dimmer and feature a replaceable LED module. They minimize energy consumption and maintenance while extending their life to 50,000 hours. Mounting hardware is available in white, bronze and brushed nickel finishes. WAClighting.com

DESIGN BUILD: HARDSCAPES

Belgard Hardscapes

The new Anglia Edger provides a cost-effective and decorative option for edging paver surfaces. Designed for edging driveways, patios, walkways and creating small planter walls, its 8-in. height also allows it to be installed on the same base as the pavers — to easily form a modern, clean, raised edge. The chiseled finish emulates hand-hewn stone and is tumbled to look distressed. Available in a variety of color choices and a number of different lengths for flexibility of design, the Anglia Edger is beveled on the ends to allow for creating both curves and angles. The larger scale of the edger makes it an alternative to mortar-set granite and other natural stone edging because there are fewer pieces to install and fewer joints. Anglia can also be used to create natural-form steps because of its height and thickness. BelgardDesignPro.com



Boulder Designs

Keep your crews busy regardless of the weather selling boulders you build.

Boulder Designs boulders are natural-looking, cost-effective site markers and signage for addresses, businesses, parks, schools, recreation facilities and memorials — and are often allowed by zoning regulations where other signage is not. Add to your product line and your bottom line with Boulder Designs. As pictured, our newest signage Boulder is gaining a lot of attention. BoulderDesigns.net

AZEK VAST

VAST Composite Pavers use a patented grid system that dramatically reduces installation time and takes the frustration and difficulty out of manually setting and aligning heavy concrete pavers. First, grids are placed on the same even, compacted sand base used with conventional concrete pavers. Next, VAST pavers are inserted into the grid in any desired pattern — alignment is automatic. Pavers are secured using a flat-plate compactor, and finally, sand swept into the paver joints completes the installation. VastPavers.com



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CalStar Products

Permeable pavers, made from 40% post-industrial recycled material as a binder, allow rainwater to drain through them, reducing stormwater runoff and flooding. Compared to concrete and clay pavers, they're made with fly ash. They're suitable for vehicular applications, are ADA-compliant for slip resistance and feature maximum allowable space between units. Available in eight colors, they meet ASTM C936 and can be packaged for mechanical installation. CalStarProducts.com



MoJack

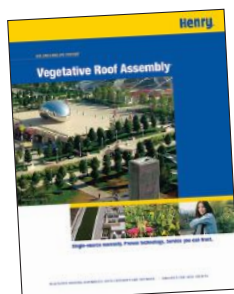
The LoadSmart design positions the load over the axle for better maneuverability. Extendable features make handling large, awkward loads easier. The appliance hand truck features telescoping handles that make merchandising, storing and using easier. Two convertible, extendable models provide an extra 12 in. of space to handle difficult loads. Accessories include moving blankets, four-wheel dollies and the LoadKicker, which will safely and easily remove a heavy stack from the base plate with one simple lift of the foot, according to the manufacturer. TheMojack.com

DESIGN/BUILD:

ENVIRONMENTAL ELEMENTS

Henry Co.

Henry Co.'s brochure for its Vegetative Roof Assembly system highlights its 790-11 hot rubberized asphalt roofing membrane. The combination of 790-11 and a diverse selection of accessory products allows for a highly flexible system, which will meet the needs of today's design professionals when specifying a vegetative roofing project. The brochure also explains the environmental sustainability of vegetative roofs, as well as their economic benefits, and provides information about other Henry sustainable roofing products. The single-source warranty that Henry Co. offers for all Vegetative Roof Assembly installations enables the building owner to contact only one source for all matters pertaining to the Vegetative Roof Assembly. Henry.com



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Joshua Taflinger met a demand to combat the emerald ash borer.

ADD-ONBIZ

BY CASEY PAYTON « EXTEND YOUR BUSINESS

Battling the emerald ash borer

By fighting the pest, one man's business soars.

JOSHUA TAFLINGER, CERTIFIED arborist, took what started out as an add-on biz and parlayed it into a full-time career. Taflinger was running a tree removal business and performing injection services on the side, and it soon became obvious to him that the emerald ash borer problem in the Indianapolis area was worsening.

Taflinger had been battling the emerald ash borer, an invasive boring beetle, with an injection product from Arborjet. The results were encouraging, so Taflinger seized the opportunity to specialize in emerald ash borer diagnosis and treatment.

He performed his first treatment in 2008. In fall 2009, he dissolved his company's tree trimming and removal

division, focusing entirely on preserving Indianapolis's ash population. His new enterprise, IndyAsh, took root.

"I treated about 300 trees total in 2008, 2009 and 2010, but last year alone I did 1,800," says Taflinger. "I'm now preparing to do as many as 5,000 trees this year. People are starting to recognize a problem as entire neighborhoods begin showing signs. But there's still a long way to go in getting the message out that there's still time to save the ash population."

While the emerald ash borer infestation is a serious problem, Taflinger knows this won't be a lifelong business. "It's pretty new science, but the estimations right now show it's going to be a 12-year period from the time a tree starts showing signs of emerald ash

»»»

PHOTO COURTESY, JOSHUA TAFLINGER

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««« borer to the time it's totally killed off," he says. "That will happen to every ash tree in the area that hasn't been treated. Once the ash trees are gone or have been treated, there will no longer be a food source for the emerald ash borer, and they won't be able to survive. Though there's still a lot of time for me to do this, there will come a point where the service is no longer needed."

By then, Taflinger hopes to have gained enough knowledge and education to be a full-blown tree doctor. Currently, if he's called out to a job that is out of his realm, he calls in a specialist. His only focus is emerald ash borer. But even though he's not treating trees for other diseases, he says he's learning more every day. "I might refer the client to a tree doctor, but I'll still do the research so I'll have the experience to eventually do these diagnoses myself," he says. "I'd love to become a consultant and be able to offer a full-range of treatment services."

While his niche requires specialized

COMPANY: IndyAsh

HEADQUARTERS:
Indianapolis, IN

WHY FOCUS ON EMERALD ASH BORER TREATMENTS? A passion and a need.

WHAT KIND OF INVESTMENT IS NEEDED? Someone starting out would need to invest in the IV equipment and a cordless drill, so you're looking at about \$2,000 for all of that. The most expensive part is the chemical, but that's purchased on an as-needed basis.

BIGGEST RISK: If you misdiagnose or the treatment doesn't work, the customer's tree is dead.

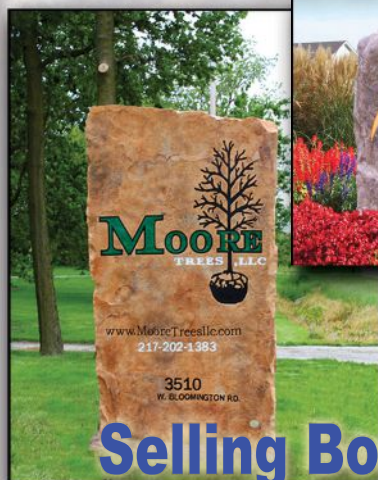
OTHER CHALLENGES: People are skeptical when they don't understand something, because they have to totally trust you. And treatment is not cheap.

knowledge, Taflinger says any business willing to invest in education can successfully add a tree injection service. "Even though I've made it my main focus, it does make a good side business," Taflinger says. "But the biggest mistake those who are new to the business will make is misidentification.... A lot of these conditions look alike. Good treatments are not cheap. The client is investing a lot of money. They'll know if you misdiagnosed it when the tree dies."

Taflinger suggests starting with just one treatment technician and seeing how it goes. "My best advice is to get educated," he says. "I would recommend about 50 to 100 hours of education. That's what makes my business a success. Anyone can buy the equipment, but if you can't answer your customers' questions you're not going to get the job."

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

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† Figures are published in our Franchise Disclosure Document (FDD) of March 2009 as mandated by the Federal Trade Commission. The above figures are actual. However, the FTC requires us to include the following statement: Caution: There is no assurance that you will do as well. If you rely on our figures, you must accept the risk of not doing as well.

John Watson, owner of Knoxville, TN-based Common Grounds Landscape Management, operates his business around a set of core values. He also promotes sustainable practices for the industry. Watson started his career in the professional landscaping industry through a high school internship and is now the president of the Tennessee Nursery & Landscape Association.

“As members of the original Green Industry, I believe it’s important for us to take the lead in finding alternative, environmentally friendly ways to manage our landscapes,” he says. Watson stops to share his views of the maintenance industry with *LM*.



John Watson (center), owner of Common Grounds Landscape Management, shows off his company’s Snapper Pro S200xtp propane-fueled mower to environmentally focused customers Randy Holloway (left) with Jones Lang LaSalle, and Mark Harvey with Cowperwood Co.

INSIDE INFO

Company: Common Grounds Landscape Management Inc.

Headquarters: Knoxville, TN

Employees: 37

Key to being a maintenance leader: My team and I operate under three core values: One, use your best judgment to do what is right and fair; two, commit yourself to excellence in everything you do and don’t accept anything less from others; and three, treat everyone as you would like to be treated. Even though the business has changed over the years, our core values have stayed the same.

TOP TRENDS

› **Propane-fueled mowers.** We started using propane-fueled mowers two years ago as participants in a study conducted by the University of Tennessee, which compared gasoline-fueled mowers with those fueled by propane. We were so impressed with the performance of the propane-fueled mowers that we converted half of our walk-behind fleet to propane-fueled models. These mowers help reduce costs, because propane costs less than gasoline for us — especially in the summer — and our on-site refueling station provides convenient refueling and virtually no fuel spillage.

› **Smartphones on the job.** We provided smartphones to our employees to help with everyday tasks and to help track our job costs. Our personnel clock in on their smartphones at the beginning of the day and clock into a specific job when they get to the property to start service. Everything is web-based, so we can check the progress of each job, what is finished and not finished, and can even post new jobs to the site.

› **Educated customers.** Google has changed the world as we know it. I have noticed our customers use Google to look up information about their plants and landscape, and they are looking for educated technicians who are just as knowledgeable. I tell my account managers not to hesitate to do a little on-site research with customers on their smartphones when questions arise. If this happens, I counsel the customer that they need to be sure they are using a reputable information source.

TOP OBSTACLE

› **Recovery from the economic downturn.** I think any obstacle is an opportunity to change and get better, which for us was how we ran our business before 2008. Things have to be important to customers before they spend their money, because in reality, your budget is their money. In light of that, we have transitioned to more customer-focused business practices. We need to remember that as the economy gets better, we need to keep whittling away at inefficiencies and creating lean management practices.

TOP OPPORTUNITIES

› **Environmental stewardship.** Our customers are really focused on finding sustainable ways to lower their carbon footprint. Common Grounds was green before it was popular to do so. We believe it’s important for the industry to find alternate ways to manage our landscapes.

› **Rewarding employees.** We developed an open-book bonus plan in 1990, which is based on our profit-and-loss statement from each month. The simple formula is sales less the cost centers on which team leaders can have a direct effect. We take this number and use a multiplier that is split between all the team leaders. During the economic downturn, this knowledge of all costs allowed our team to become very lean. With everyone working together, we were able to save all the full-time jobs — and actually increased team leaders’ bonuses.

The author is the director, Business Development & Marketing for the Propane Education & Research Council.

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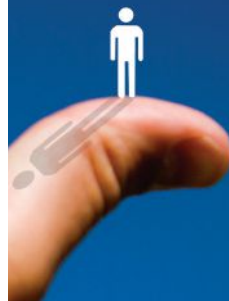
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[Coming in May]

Many plows, like this Caterpillar sectional snowplow, sat idle this winter.

WARM WINTER BLUES

In many parts of the country, snowplows, and the contractors who operate them, sat idly by as record warmth kept snow from piling up in clients' driveways and parking lots. In an industry intertwined with the weather, the mild temperatures dramatically affected many operators. And because insect pest populations, weeds and turf diseases usually diminished by the cold went largely unscathed this winter, lawn care business owners also have been deeply affected. *LM* next month will explore the impact the mild winter had on the Green Industry.



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MY BIGGEST MISTAKE

LESSONS LEARNED THE HARD WAY » BY CASEY PAYTON



A landscape business owner says failing to recognize the good times caused him to miss out on strategic opportunities.



Mark Ahronian learned recognizing the good times is key to surviving the bad times.

COMPANY: Ahronian Landscaping and Design Inc.

HEADQUARTERS: Holliston, MA

NO. OF EMPLOYEES: 10

SERVICE BREAKDOWN: Design/build: 80%, Maintenance: 20%

CLIENT BREAKDOWN: 95% residential

WHILE GETTING
WIN a groove can be good for business,

Mark Ahronian, MCH, president and designer of Ahronian Landscaping and Design, Holliston, MA, says he now recognizes the importance of paying closer attention to the “ups and downs” and making business moves accordingly. That includes making bigger moves when times are good — something Ahronian says he failed to do. In not recognizing the good times, Ahronian says he missed out on the opportunity to purchase equipment and grow the company.

“Instead of recognizing that we were in really good times, I felt it was the ‘norm’ and it was what I could expect out of business as we moved forward,” says Ahronian. “I never thought things could get so bad.”

But they did, and Ahronian says that putting off equipment purchases that could have made the company more efficient was a bad decision. “I was being conservative by putting off equipment purchases, but now nobody is lending, and it’s incredibly difficult to make large purchases,” he says. “Being too conservative for that era of time — when business was good — has been my biggest mistake.”

Gauging good business

Ahronian says being able to recognize good times is the first step in knowing that it’s okay to be a little more aggressive with purchases. “If you’re booked for eight weeks or more, that’s likely a good indicator that business is good and you should start thinking about new or different equipment that can make you more efficient,” he says.

“When business is good is the time to analyze your efficiencies and make sure you’re getting the most out of billable hours. It may not just be field equipment — it might be something in the office. Maybe you need a new computer system to keep up with the flow.”

Follow the ups and downs

Part of gauging when times are good is following the ups and downs. Ahronian says that his previous method was just “floating along” — especially when times were good. “Now I realize that if we’d been more on top of things and recognized how good the times were that we could have made more money and been better prepared for the bad times,” he says. “Many small business owners don’t plan ahead for bad times because it’s easy to get comfortable and float along in the good years.”

But in 2009 Ahronian had the worst year in his company’s history. He had to lay off an entire crew and found himself caught in a Catch-22. “I no longer had the labor crew, so I really needed the equipment. But I hadn’t made those purchases when times were good. I found myself in a really tough spot.”

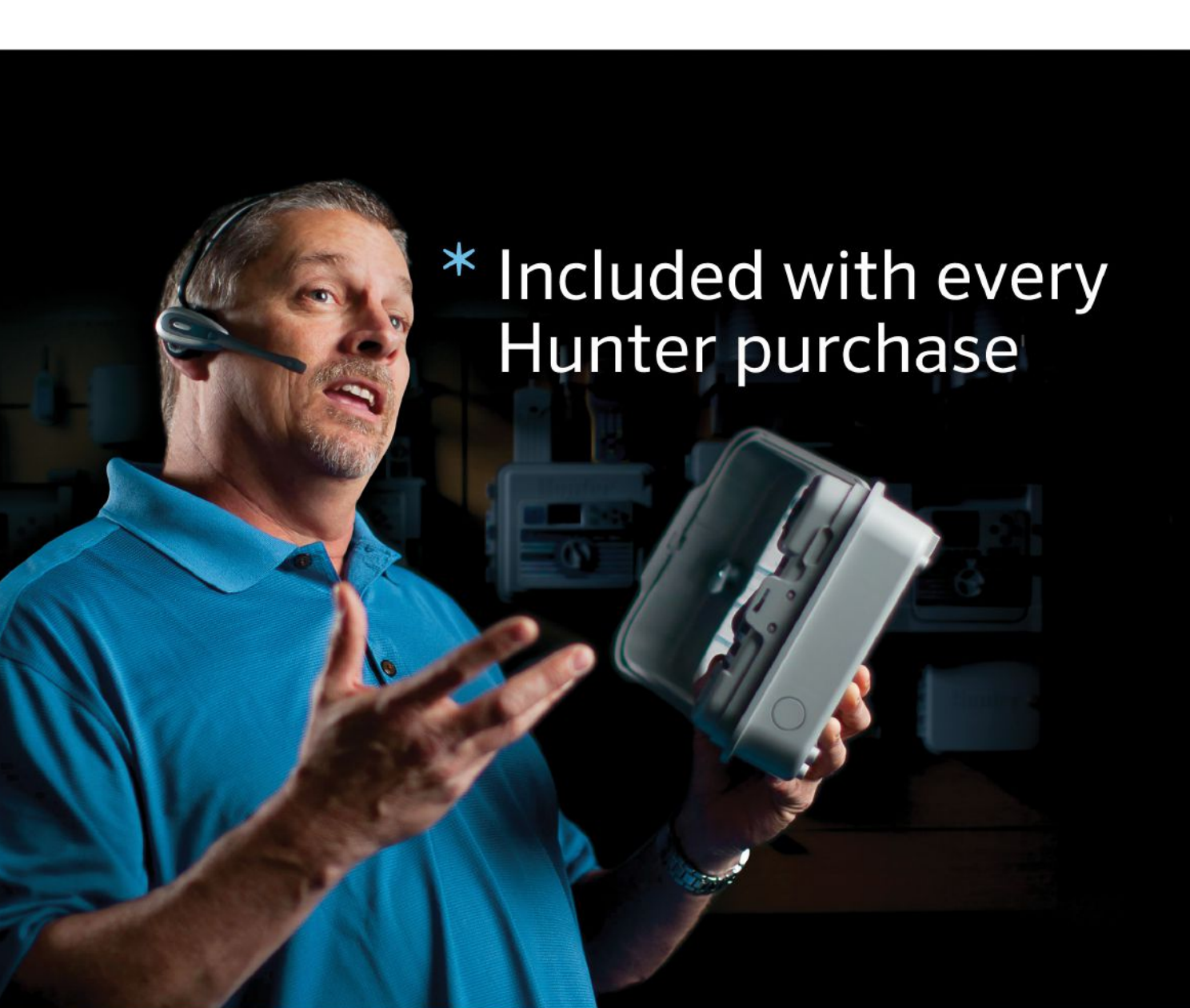
Don’t rest on your laurels

In moving forward, Ahronian says the biggest lesson he’s learned is not to rest on his laurels. He says he’ll never again assume everything will be fine.

“I look at things a little backwards now,” Ahronian admits. “The next time we have a really good year will be the time I say, ‘Uh oh, what do we have to do to prepare when the bottom falls out?’ I’m always going to be on my guard whether times are good or bad.”

Ahronian also has changed the way he sets prices. That used to be done in the spring of each year but now he reassesses prices every month. “Prices for materials are fluctuating every month, so you constantly need to be looking at what you’re charging,” he says. “I’d also advise not pricing jobs out too far in advance. The bottom line is that you have to be prepared. You don’t have to spend your life worrying, but you can’t assume everything is always going to be fine.”

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



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