

## A commercial success

Employees of Lawn Ranger star in a nationally televised ad for AT&T. BY DAN JACOBS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**W**ith the advent of digital video recorders that allow viewers to pause live television broadcasts and later zip past commercials, you might wonder if anybody watches ads anymore.

Well you can bet the employees of Eden Prairie, MN-based Lawn Ranger (and their families) recently spent a lot of time zipping through the shows to get to the commercials — at least one commercial in particular.

The company and some of its employees were featured in a nationally televised 30-second commercial for AT&T.

“It was an amazing thing in Minnesota,” said Joe Unger, president of Lawn Ranger. “They spend a lot of money on these ads. We had people that did our clothes, catering, make-up artists.”

The commercial features Lawn Ranger’s use of the Xora, a smart phone application combined with the AT&T network, explains Todd Dilley, operations director. Xora is a mobile enterprise application designed to help organizations improve productivity and service goals by giving them real-time visibility into the locations and activities of employees and vehicles and by eliminating manual data collection and paperwork.

The commercial was unscripted. The company’s employees were simply asked to talk about their work and how they use the smart phone and computer app.

Horticulturist Bobby Jensen, for example, talks about why Lawn Ranger is actually a misnomer because the company



takes care of far more than just lawns.

The irony? Unger never appears on screen. “I mumble too much, and I’m not very good in front of the camera,” he says. “I couldn’t remember my lines very well.” Maybe so, but he’s been running a successful business since 1985.

Dilley gets a lot of screen time (at least in the long version of the commercial, available at: <http://yourbusiness.att.com/smallbiz/story/lawn-ranger>) showing the company’s old way of tracking workers, machines, materials and jobs — a massive whiteboard. “It was utter chaos,” he says.

AT&T’s Minnesota-based sales representatives nominated Lawn Ranger to appear in the commercial. More than 100 companies were up for the spot. That list was narrowed to four and ultimately down to just Lawn Ranger.

The production team comprised about 50 people, which spent four days



It took four days and a production team of 50 people — including make-up artists, light designers, camera operators and a director — to produce a commercial featuring Lawn Ranger employees.

at Lawn Ranger’s facilities in late January. Although snow is a large part of the company’s business, the commercial was filmed using a lot of artificial snow, dry ice and foam.

The spot aired about 350 times on various networks over a six-week period. And while the employees were required to join the screen actors’ guild, none expects to be appearing in any Hollywood productions anytime soon. Although there is some hope AT&T will use Lawn Ranger in a “sequel” featuring the company’s summer services.

Lawn Ranger’s sales are up heading into the spring. Whether or not you can attribute it to the commercial, Unger is not sure, but many of Lawn Ranger’s customers have sent congratulatory emails.

“It’s built a lot of confidence in us,” Dilley says. “It was a once-in-a-lifetime experience, and it was super fun.”

# An entrepreneur turns inventor

BY DAN JACOBS EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Tom Del Conte had a problem. Since a ready solution wasn't available he did the only thing he could. He created his own.

"There are approximately 25 million controllers across the United States," explains Del Conte, the creator of Sprinkler Times. "Smart controllers are the wave of the future. Three percent of those controllers are smart controllers. What do we do about the 97%? If we're going to try to go 'green' and sustainable, how do we know how many minutes to program the other 97% of the timers until they get converted?"

The Sprinkler Times app, which sells for \$5.99 on the iTunes store, allows contractors to set irrigation plans for properties without performing time-consuming water audits.

"We're (into) the '100 days of hell,'" says Del Conte, founder and president

of Del Conte's Landscaping. "That's when we can save the most but that's when we're the busiest. Who's really going to be paying that much attention to the controllers?"

The app takes weather data from weather stations around the country (localized to zip code) and factors in a number of variables (soil, shade, etc.) and the ever-changing evapotranspiration rates to give technicians a yard's proper irrigation schedule.

Del Conte recognizes that the industry is headed down the smart controller route, which means his app is not a long-term solution.

"We think we'll be obsolete in 5 to 10 years — all those old timers will be out of there," he says. "Until then, we've still got a water crisis on our hands, and it's not getting any better. We're pumping water out of the ground like crazy."

It took Del Conte more than a year



SprinklerTimes offers contractors a way to set irrigation schedules for controllers.

to put the app together. At one point he scrapped the entire programming team and started from

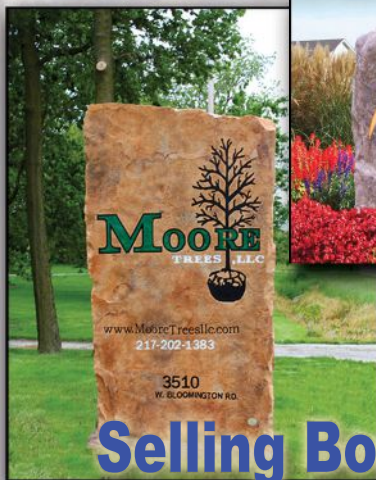
scratch. "It was every bit like building a house," he says. "You don't even know the decisions you have to make until you get there."

But now that he's there, he is happy with the results.

"We're looking for some cool stuff to happen out of this," Del Conte says. "We're excited about the idea we might make an impact."

PHOTOS COURTESY: APPLE INC.

## Get in Before Your Competition...



I motivate my clients by offering products my competition can't!

"I made the Gooch And Company boulder 3 months after my initial training"  
-Franchisee Ron Nearon Kokomo, IN

### Selling Boulders "You" Build

A Franchise Worth Investing In!

- \*Protected Territories
- \*80% Net Profit - 0% Competition†



www.BoulderDesigns.net  
Toll Free 877.892.2954

† 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.

# Syngenta's Bell retires

After 35 years, Bell says 'goodbye' to the Green Industry. BY BETH GERACI

It's been a long time, but after 35 years at the company, Syngenta marketing communications manager Margaret Bell retired May 4.

"It's time to move on to something else," Bell said. "It's hard to believe that somebody can be in a job that long. Once you start having deadlines in your life, your life starts to go by very quickly. Before you know it, it's 35 years."

Bell launched her Syngenta career in the Chemicals Group in the 1970s, switching to Ag in 1980. "That's when my career really started moving," she said, noting the rise of generics at the time. "It was pretty exciting being at

the forefront of that." In 2001, Bell moved to marketing communications in Syngenta's Lawn & Garden Group.

Bell "has been a trailblazer in our industry in many ways, and her business savvy, contacts and knowledge of the golf, lawn care and landscape markets will be difficult to replicate at Syngenta," said Syngenta Turf and Landscape Territory Manager Lee Bloomcamp.

"You always enjoyed working on a project with Margaret," added Walt Osborne, Syngenta's key account manager for national golf accounts. "She has a great sense of humor, and you knew you could count on her to get the job done – and done right."

Bell was active in many Green Industry associations throughout her tenure, especially the Turf and Ornamental Communicators Association (TOCA),



Margaret Bell will miss the people of the Green Industry most of all.

of which she served as vice president for nearly 12 years. She'll always remember the sing-alongs at TOCA.

"I will miss my involvement in TOCA a lot," she said. "That is a fun time. Sometimes just watching people sing, it's just so much fun. The passion we have for what we do is expressed in the way we sing the song."

Bell will miss the people of the Green Industry most of all. It's "pretty good to know you're around people who are all good folks," she said. "I will miss that more than anything."

She'll probably work on projects during her retirement, she said, but a 40-hour workweek is out of the question. Instead, she'll spend more time with family and enjoy the down time. "It's just time to go," she said. "I'm not even nervous. I'm excited about my future."

PHOTO COURTESY: TOM MENTZER

**permagreen™**  
**Dream Big. Expect More.**

**Win one FREE!**  
 And make your dreams come true!

**permagreen.com | 800.346.2001**

© 2011 PermaGreen™ Supreme, Inc. U.S. Patents 6,366,600 & 7,954,573. All rights reserved. \* Subject to terms, conditions, and applicable laws.



Triumph Options:  
 Available with choice of standard 3-hole or optional 1-hole spreader mechanisms in a Spreader Sprayer or Spread-Only version  
 Spray-Only version coming soon