



George Gaumer

Retired v.p. and general manager of Davey Commercial Grounds Management, Kent, Ohio



Who's your mentor? If I had to pick one, it would be my father. But here at Davey there are a lot of folks who have championed me and helped me along the way.

My dad ran a landscape company in Warren, Ohio. He was a good general landscape professional and taught me a lot about values.

You retired last month after 36 years at Davey.

What's changed the most about the Green Industry during that time? The first thing that comes to mind

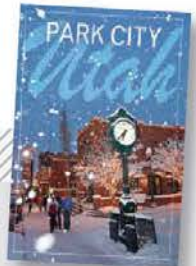
is government regulations. They're so much more difficult to adhere to today. Another change is all the litigation has created a tremendous trickle-down effect. Our health care costs have been driven through the roof. It has hit landscape businesses in contract costs: insurance, indemnification and holds harmless contracts and various wage and hour issues. All of us in leadership positions have to make sure all the Ts are crossed and Is are dotted. Some of my compatriots in the industry don't read contracts closely enough and that can expose you to serious risks.

Davey is now 14 times the size it was when you joined it as a \$50 million company.

What's driven the company to such heights? A couple things come to mind: One is employee ownership. We all own a piece and that creates a great deal of motivation. Also, it's very fiscally sound. That's allowed us to take advantage of some growth opportunities, like acquisitions or big contracts. We've been conservative over the years and it's served us really well.

What are you most proud of accomplishing during your career? I'd have to say it's this last phase of my career where we basically started the commercial grounds maintenance division. Around 1996 the commitment was made and we started with a talented team of guys here. We were able to build the systems and the branch network and a whole separate division. And, within our grounds management division we have a division that focuses on just golf course maintenance. We're up to 750 people and I'm really proud of seeing that develop over 16 years. Another thing I'm proud of is having a great team in this succession. They have a tremendous level of experience and energy and they're going to do a great job.

What advice do you have for young landscape professionals who are company execs rather than sole owners? When you look at the role you play in a company, it's important to realize it was there before you got there and it will probably be there after you leave, so realize you're responsible for moving forward the legacy. It's about doing your job and handing it off in better shape. That's always served me well.



OFF THE CLOCK

WHAT DO YOU HAVE PLANNED FOR RETIREMENT? It's a culmination of a long-term plan to live in the Rocky Mountains. We built a house outside of Park City, Utah.



WHO'S YOUR TEAM? We're big-time Buckeye fans. My wife and I met at Ohio State; we're both alumni, and our son is too.

DO YOU HAVE ANY INDULGENCES? I love horsepower and I love wine. But no, not together (laughs). My wife and I love to travel. We've been to 47 states, all but Oregon, Washington and Alaska. After we move we're going to cruise up through Oregon and Washington. And then an Alaskan cruise is on the list. After that, Italy is next.

IF YOU WEREN'T AT DAVEY ALL THESE YEARS, WHAT WOULD YOU HAVE BEEN DOING? My goal was to be an ad exec. I grew up in my father's business, went to Ohio State for marketing and wanted nothing to do with the landscape business. This worked out a whole lot better than Madison Ave. would have.

