



Jim McCutcheon, LIC

CEO of HighGrove Partners, Austell, Ga.



Who's your mentor? As far as the landscape industry goes, it's the tale of the two Franks. Frank Ross [with 3PG Consulting]: I've been working with him for over 15 years. He's had a huge impact on not only my business growth but my personal growth. And with Frank Mariani [owner of Mariani Landscape], it's about seeing a man that's truly in love with this industry and loves his business, as well.

When did you first get involved with PLANET [and its predecessor, ALCA]? The first event I attended was in Ft.

Worth in 1995. I was just blown away. I knew there was an industry out there, I just didn't know how dynamic it was. Then I realized I could meet some really fantastic people. I started traveling the country doing R&D—rob and duplicate.

My first Student Career Days was in 2001 and I was the chair by 2003.

You said in a blog post not too long ago, "Every company needs to have a leader that's willing to be unpopular at times. That willingness means you have the courage to make tough calls that will lead to better times for all members of the team." What's a tough call you've made? I've made a number of them, particularly over this difficult economic time. I've bought out two partners in the last four years, both of whom did not know it was coming. I'm still a friend to both of them and we do some work with them from time to time. It was an extremely difficult thing to do.

The year before last I told our team in our year-end town-hall meeting, as I looked at where we were with tremendous momentum, we needed to make an investment in the company. I decided that we not do raises for the following year. I said, "Look, if we had leaders in the world today that were willing to be unpopular at times, we wouldn't be in nearly as bad a shape as a country. My responsibility is to make sure not only today is great but tomorrow is better." Several people have thanked me for always thinking about the future. It was the right decision.

When you were studying landscape architecture, did you ever envision yourself as a CEO? I studied landscape architecture, but in reality I'm a terrible landscape architect. I realized pretty quickly I had a better knack for building and running a business. Pretty early on when I was with Post Properties as a junior landscape architect, I knew I wanted to do a lot more and I quickly came to understand I wanted to own my own business. Thankfully the opportunity came to buy the business from Post Properties in 2001.



OFF THE CLOCK

DO YOU DO ANY OF YOUR OWN LANDSCAPING?

I'm terrible at it. Years ago, I told the [HighGrove] guys, "I can't keep up with the landscape anymore." They said, "Good, you've been embarrassing us for a long time."

WHO MAKES UP YOUR FAMILY?

I have three kids 13, 14 and 15. They are my world. My daughter is the oldest—it's Anna Reeves, Brenner and Wills.



HAVE YOU SEEN ANY GOOD MOVIES LATELY?

Good movies? I did enjoy the Bond movie, "Skyfall." It's still hard to beat "The Godfather: Part II." I really love the whole trilogy.

WHERE ARE YOU FROM? I've been here since I was about 9 years old. In Atlanta, that's as close to a native as you get.

FAVORITE VACATION SPOT? I'm an obsessed fly fisherman. I go to Montana every year. My good friend Tom Fochtman [of Ceibass Venture Partners] is part owner of a lodge in Ennis, Mont. This year is the first time ever I'm taking customers out there.

