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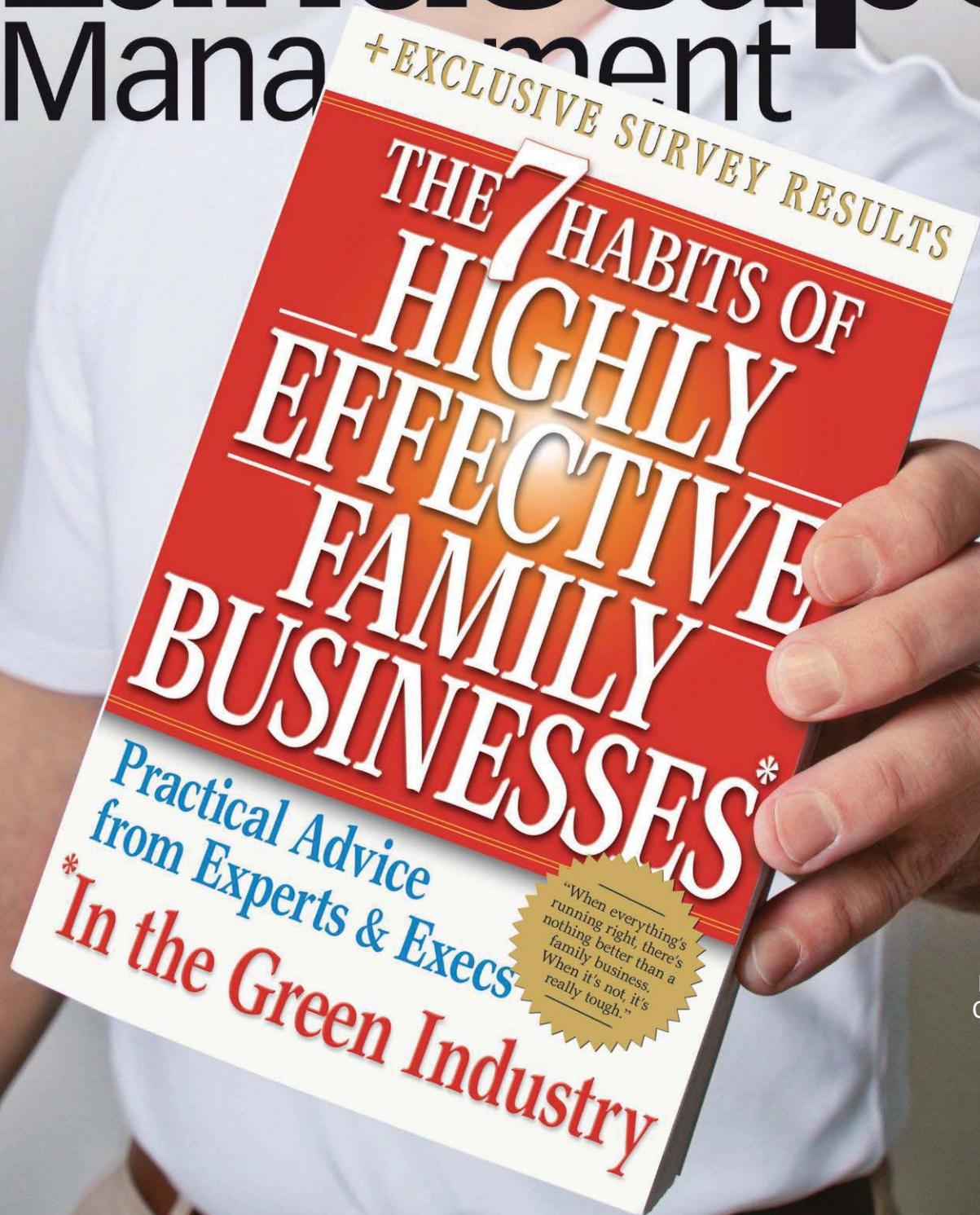
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STORY  
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ON P. 22



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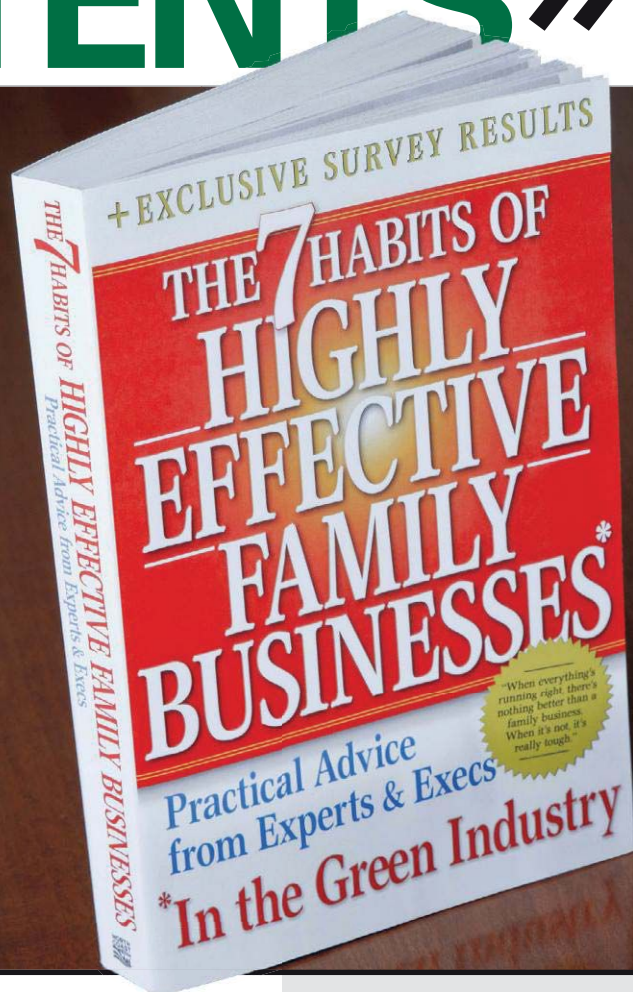
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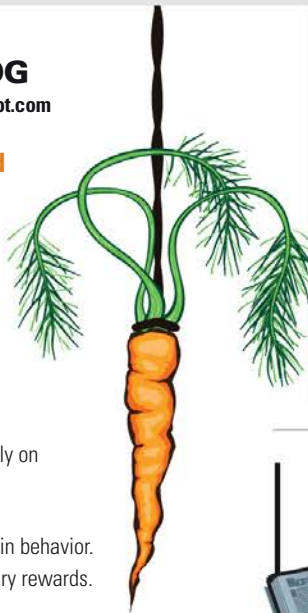
## FROM THE *LM* BLOG

» [LandscapeManagement.blogspot.com](http://LandscapeManagement.blogspot.com)

### The four myths behind incentives



Avoid the pitfalls of incentive programs by being aware of these common myths, Green Industry consultant and *LM* blogger Jeffrey Scott says.



1. Incentives should be focused only on what a person can control.
2. An incentive should be holistic.
3. Incentives will create a change in behavior.
4. Incentives must pay out monetary rewards.

For the full blog post, visit [goo.gl/g0rWJ](http://goo.gl/g0rWJ).

## WEB EXTRAS

» At the Green Industry Great Escape in Las Vegas last month, attendees toured the Bellagio's Conservatory & Gardens. See what they learned and check out a time-lapse video of one of its five annual exhibit change-outs.



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The Bellagio's Patricia Streeter (left) explains interior horticultural care, as Barbara Stropek looks on.

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## EDITOR'S NOTE

MARISA PALMIERI EDITOR

Contact Marisa at 216/706-3764 or via email at mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net.

# Vitamin N

I'm on the cusp of the generation Richard Louv, author of *Last Child in the Woods* and *The Nature Principle*, defines as having "nature deficit disorder" or a deficiency in vitamin N (N is for nature). A child of the 1980s, I had minimal access to technology other than the television in my early years, unlike today's kids. But by middle school, my family had a PC. By high school we had an Internet connection. And by college I had a cell phone.

Still, I played *outside* as a kid. I got dirty. I ran around in bare feet. When we were 8 or 10 my sister, our neighborhood friends and I had a fort in the woods behind our house. I went to week-long Girl Scout summer camp. We played "spud" and "sardines," had campfires and caught lightning bugs late into the summer nights.

Will my daughters, Sadie and Paige, ages 3 and not quite 2, have the same type of childhoods? I'd be lying if I said I wasn't worried about it. On top of my concern that they'll miss out on a lot of fun, grass stains and skinned knees, there are potentially more serious repercussions for their generation: the soaring rates of childhood obesity, attention deficit disorder and anxiety, just to name a few.

As a member of the Green Industry, you probably have—or had at one time—a healthy dose of vitamin N. And you likely have the same concerns for the well being of the children in your life. That's not to mention the direct impact future generations' nature deficits may have on

the market for landscaping services.

Thankfully, you and I are far from the only ones concerned. There's Louv, his ground-breaking books and the work of the Children & Nature Network (C&NN) he co-founded. One of C&NN's initiatives is Let's G.O.!, which encourages people of all ages to "get outside" to play, serve and celebrate during the month of April. There are First Lady Michelle Obama's Let's Move and Let's Move Outside campaigns. In the landscape industry, there's Project EverGreen, which aims to preserve and enhance green spaces of all kinds. And there's Come Alive Outside, a movement founded by Green Industry consultant Jim Paluch and supported by the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) and a handful of suppliers. (See page 6 for more on his presentation at PLANET's Green Industry Great Escape in Las Vegas last month.)

As Paluch puts it, the landscape industry has been out-marketed by Hollywood and the electronic communications industries. How many of your prospects don't have a 56-in. flat-screen TV with a complete indoor entertainment system? Very few of them, right? It's time to show them that by improving their outdoor living areas, they'll bring their families more memories, joy and wellness than a black box ever could. Sell them on *outside*.

When that happens, and when our nation's vitamin N levels rise, we'll have one fewer worry for our children and our children's children.

# Landscape Management

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## What happened in Vegas?

PLANET's Green Industry Great Escape encourages new ways of thinking. BY MARISA PALMIERI

**W**hat happened in Las Vegas at the Professional Landcare Network's (PLANET's) Green Industry Great Escape? More than 150 contractors, suppliers and spouses convened at The Cosmopolitan Feb. 20-23 for education sessions geared toward executives, leadership meetings, networking and fun. Hopefully what they learned won't stay in Vegas.

### Coming alive

Green Industry consultant Jim Paluch welcomed Great Escape attendees with the "Come Alive Outside" message he founded, which is supported by PLANET and a handful of industry suppliers. The flagship website, [ComeAliveOutside.com](http://ComeAliveOutside.com), features free tips and resources for companies to promote the message, webinars and information about in-person education events.

There is no membership fee; it's a grass-roots effort, Paluch explained. The goal? "Capture the business opportunities of today while creating a better world for tomorrow. "We need to move our focus to helping people 'come alive outside,'" he said, referring to some of today's biggest problems, like childhood obesity. "We're dying a slow death inside. Do we want to be the industry



Above: Speaker and magician Jon Petz had some fun with John Deere's Segment Marketing Manager Ken Taylor. Right: Jim Paluch spread the "Come Alive Outside" message.



that cuts grass and installs landscapes or the profession that transforms the health of the nation?"

### Finding a cause

Roger Phelps, promotional communications manager for Stihl, led a roundtable discussion on cause marketing with Bill Brunelle of Independent We Stand, an online community of locally owned businesses that educate their communities about the benefits of buying local. Independent We Stand is sponsored by Stihl, which sells its products only through independent dealers.

Independent We Stand, with more than 100,000 members, has taken off. Finding such a "cause" could translate to success for landscape contractors,

too. Consider another cause marketing campaign: Small Business Saturday. Brunelle pointed out it was founded by American Express. More than 100 million consumers shopped local on this day in 2012 (the Saturday after Thanksgiving).

Phelps emphasized cause marketing campaigns must be authentic. "If the cause isn't part of your DNA, customers will sniff that out," he said.

The roundtable conversation turned to PLANET's annual Day of Service event and the "Come Alive Outside" movement, which attendees had learned about the day before, and how companies could leverage these things in promoting their own businesses.

### Show time!

It wouldn't be Vegas without seeing a show, and speaker and magician Jon Petz emphasized the importance

of creating "show time" moments for customers because, as he said, "No one remembers boring."

Body language expert Janine Driver presented "The New Executive Presence," which was anything but boring. A law enforcement trainer, she taught the audience what signs they may be sending with their body language, and how to read others' actions.

She also spoke about "inattentive blindness," which occurs when executives are hyperfocused on one thing, so they miss problems or crimes unfolding before them (think: embezzlement).

"Information can be right under our eyes and we miss it," she said. "You have to look at things with a different perspective. It could literally change your business."

### » WEB EXTRA



Visit the Web Extras section of [LandscapeManagement.net](http://LandscapeManagement.net) to see why attendees were awed by the Bellagio Conservatory & Botanical Gardens.



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# MAILBOX



## Nice mix

Congratulations on a fantastic (February) issue! I love reading valuable articles and learning about improvement opportunities for our business and for me personally. An added value is seeing the faces of and reading about colleagues whom I have known for a long time, like Dan Eichenlaub, Drake Snodgrass and Maurice

Dowell. They are outstanding people who genuinely deserve recognition for the positive influence they have on our industry and the people with whom they associate.

This issue has a nice mix of high-quality content. Accept my sincere thanks for excellent journalism.

### Tom Shotzberger

*General Manager, Shreiner Tree Care  
King of Prussia, Pa.*

## Bigger's not better

I've complained about this (*LM150*, forthcoming in June) before but to no avail. Volume does not a good company make. This is the continuation of the American ego myth about bigger is better. You and most of the media have never figured out that bigger doesn't mean better. How about companies that have the most satisfied employees and customers as a benchmark? I'll continue to complain about your folly and misguided criterion and you will continue to say this is what your readers want to see. This is very sad. There are thousands of good companies in our industry who don't want to be huge that do a wonderful job for their customers and are fair to their employees.

### Charles Bowers

*President, Garden Gate Landscaping  
Silver Spring, Md.*

Kudos? Complaints? Share your thoughts with the *Landscape Management* team by emailing [mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net](mailto:mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net).

## Hit the spot

"About us" (Editor's Note, February) hit the spot. We've perused the Radiant Plumbing page, and we're all quite impressed. Everything in life and business is all about marketing and relationships. Thanks again for everything that you do for our industry.

### Gary LaScalea

*Owner, GroGreen  
Plano, Texas*



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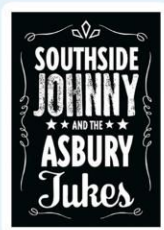




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# Profiting from Patel

Northwestern University professor Homi Patel shares 10 tips on how to ensure success.

BY BETH GERACI

**H**omi Patel, professor of marketing at Northwestern University's Kellogg School of Management, was a featured speaker at the peer group gathering Next Level University last November. (For more on that event, see "Raising the Bar" in our January issue at [goo.gl/2bHb8](http://goo.gl/2bHb8).)

Speaking to leaders and staff from six notable landscaping companies Patel, retired chairman and CEO of Hartmarx Corp., shared his views on managing employees and pleasing customers. In the process, he gave those in attendance much to think about.

Patel emphasized there are 10 things a company in the service industry must get right. Here they are, in his own words. Companies that follow this advice, Patel says, will benefit.

**1 Define your service offering.** Every business needs to understand what they're going to do well—and what they're not going to do well.

This is not a casual choice. Instead, it is a choice that you perform badly at some things so that you can afford to excel at others. For example, if you are going to provide the very best service, you have to get comfortable with the fact that you cannot provide the best price.

**2 Delight your customer by doing unexpected and surprising things.** Everybody has good service, everybody has great service. But that's just not enough. What you've got to do is delight your customer. Take Disney, for example. You stand 40 minutes for a two-minute

ride and yet those kids come out *thrilled*. Try getting a kid that age to stand 40 minutes for anything. Disney figured out how to delight its customer.

**3 Be aware of your customers' pain points.** Don't ignore the uncontrolled pain points, because that's when you're going to lose one of your customers. Know about divorces, deaths or whatever it is. Your clients need you at that particular time. Keep in regular contact. Empathize. Deliver new information without being a pest.



Homi Patel

A lot of customers are lost, particularly in the service business, because businesspeople a) are not aware of the pain point that's going to hit them, which is uncontrollable, and b) haven't devised a plan to get close to the customer in that particular area.

**4 Hire for attitude; train for aptitude.** When it comes to recruiting and selecting talent, 100 percent of employers want the smartest, the best people. But the simple reality is, the people who have it all are expensive to employ. A competitive cost structure requires compromising on employees. Hire for attitude; train for aptitude. You need 100 percent of your employees to have a great attitude. You don't need 100 percent of your employees to be A+ students.

**5 Know that employee sacrifice is not sustainable.** You must recognize the difference between a stretched employee—which is good—and a stressed employee, which is not so good. Don't expect that you're going to do well in the long run by just constantly putting more and more pressure on your employees.

**6 Understand that training requires transforming the complex into the simple.** It's as simple as that. Make sure the training curve puts your to-do list on your employee's to-do list. A good training program enables employees to exceed their own expectations. Cut out the boilerplate stuff so training creates energy rather than saps it.

**7 Reward employees.** Remember, your employees are closest to the customer. Reward them for insights and information and use them in multiple ways. They know what kind of people really fit into the organization. Let them help you recruit talent, and reward them for it.

**8 Control personnel.** Your largest cost is personnel. I don't need to do a survey on that. We've already discussed hiring for attitude, training for aptitude, but there's another big issue in employee cost, and that's managers not making the tough call on personnel. An employee functioning below expectations is costing you money.

**9 Get rid of customer sludge.** Everyone has them: those customers you don't make money on. The customer who demands too much. Anybody who demands unprofitable levels of service, you have to have the guts to get rid of them, from a profitability point of view.

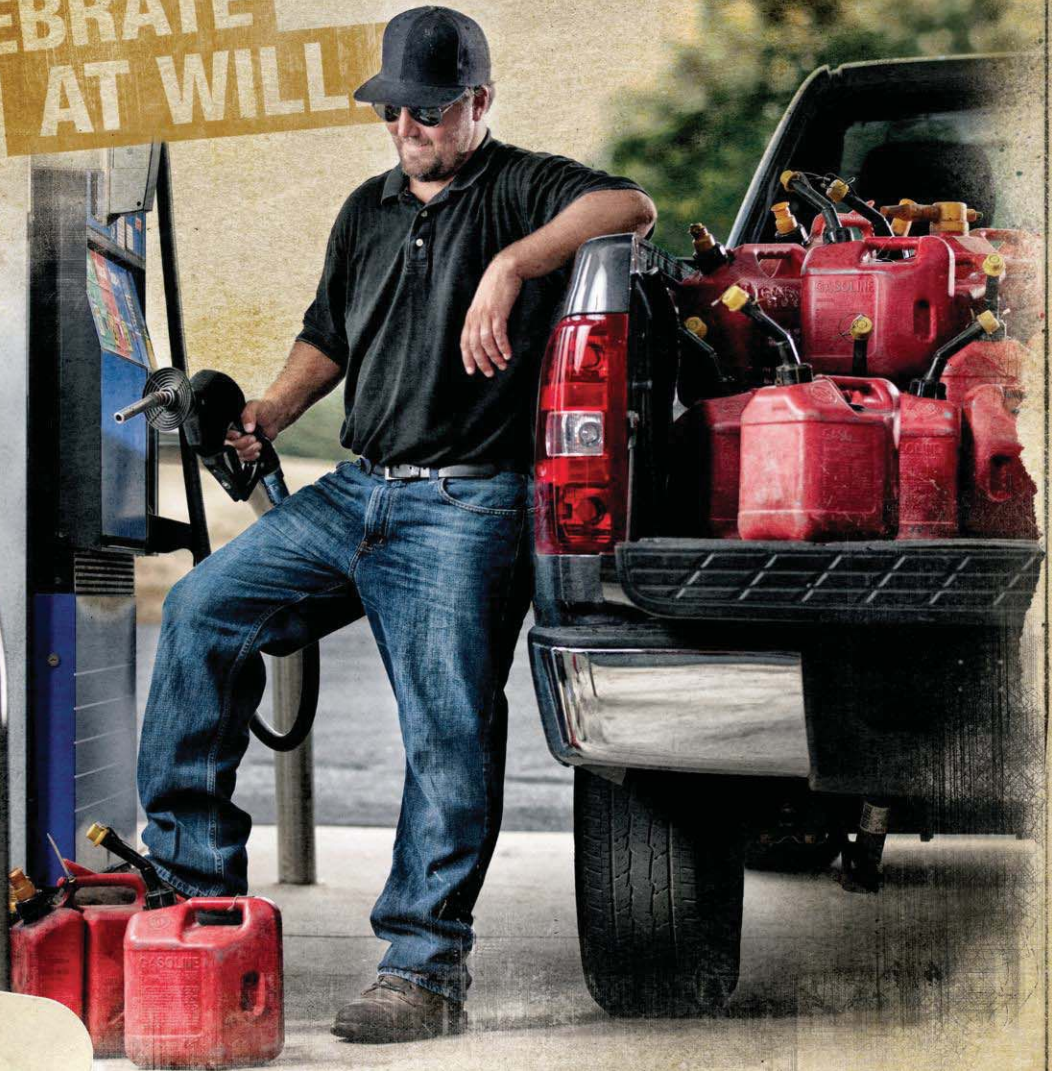
Next, make your customers do things for themselves to eliminate unnecessary costs. But give them a plus, as well. Take airport kiosks, for example. By creating these, airlines saved themselves money, but travelers benefit as well. You can check yourself in, you don't have to deal with a surly attendant and you can walk right in through security. They created a win-win.

**10 Finally, lead by example.** You built this business. You are the leaders of this business. If you don't have passion, energy, integrity and humility, you have no reason to expect your employees to have any.



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# Well worth it

Acres Group invests in its community with an array of service work. BY CASEY PAYTON

The list of community service activities the Acres Group in Wauconda, Ill., participates in is more than 20 items long. The involvement in most of these opportunities originated organically, but Acres Group incorporated its community involvement into the com-

pany structure by initiating a wellness committee in 2010 that supports ongoing efforts and selects projects to participate in each year.

There are 22 employees on the committee. It chooses community service events that will be meaningful to both employees and the business. “For instance, we chose to support JDRF in 2012 and again in 2013 because we have over 30 employees who suffer from diabetes,” says Maureen Scheitz, vice president of human resources. “Our owner, Jim Schwantz, and our vice president of finance, Paul Washburn, are committed to the Wauconda Chamber of Commerce events where a large number of employees have the opportunity to serve.”

The company embraces community service from the top down, says Washburn. “As a larger company in Wauconda, we recognize that we can make a difference in the community with our resources and support.”

Time and resources are tight for everyone these days, so many companies say they don’t have time for commu-



Top: For the past four years Acres has hosted an annual Arbor Day sale in its Wauconda, Ill., parking lot. Proceeds assist the town in maintaining its Tree City USA status.

Bottom: Ten Acres employees participate annually in a two-day, 150-mile bike ride to benefit multiple sclerosis.

nity involvement and service opportunities. But Scheitz points out they not only do tremendous good for the community, but they also benefit the company, serving as team-building activities.

“It’s a way for employees to connect outside of work and to give back to the community or a good cause at the same time,” she says. “Most of our service involvement is commitment of time as opposed to financial donations. Time is as scarce a resource as money nowadays, but the rewards are worth the investment.”

Washburn agrees. “One has to make the time to support these events,” he says.

“Things never fit nicely into a work week, so it has to be important enough to you to work around the obstacles and still find time to give back.”

As for donated resources, he says, “it doesn’t always have to be money. Many events we support, we donate time or planning rather than funds.”

Even a small effort can make a difference, adds Sherm Fields, vice president of marketing. “We understand tough times, but every little bit helps. Donations and volunteerism that come with some real personal sacrifice tend to be the most rewarding to the giver—and hopefully the recipient as well.”

## AT A GLANCE

Company: Acres Group  
Headquarters: Wauconda, Ill.  
CEO: Jim Schwantz

### SELECT PROJECT LISTING:

▶ **Holiday family sponsorships**—For more than seven years employees have sponsored less-fortunate families, providing Thanksgiving meals and fulfilling Christmas lists.

▶ **Feed My Starving Children**—In 2010 and 2011 Acres Group volunteers packaged food for children in third-world countries.

▶ **JDRF Ron Santo Walk**—In 2012, 50-plus employees, clients, families and friends raised more than \$12,500 for juvenile diabetes research. Efforts included fundraising via a soccer tournament and a concert put on by an employee’s band.

▶ **Wauconda Food Drive**—Employees have donated approximately a pallet of food annually for 10 years. Plus, they’ve helped pick up food from others and deliver it to the food pantry.

Landscape Management is the media sponsor of the Professional Landscape Network’s (PLANET) Community Stewardship Award. We’ll feature each of the program’s winners January through June. For more information or to read about the other winners, visit [landscarenetwork.org/awards/communityaward](http://landscarenetwork.org/awards/communityaward) or [landscapemanagement.net/givingback](http://landscapemanagement.net/givingback).





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## BEST PRACTICES

BRUCE WILSON

The author, of the Wilson-Oyler Group, is a 30-year industry veteran. Reach him at [bwilson@wilson-oyler.com](mailto:bwilson@wilson-oyler.com).

# Family business transitions

If you've ever been involved in a family enterprise, you know it can be a bumpy ride.

When it comes to leadership transitions, the process can be particularly difficult if internal conflicts, feuding and personal rivalries obstruct a seamless transition.

Data show that 70 percent of family businesses do not survive the transition from founder to second generation; only about 10 percent are planned and executed through to the third generation.

To ensure the viability of your business and ease the generational transition, a succession plan is essential. It not only will prioritize business needs over family desires, but it also will serve to clarify potential squabbling, put guidelines around awkward communication topics such as finances and mortality, and establish protocols around legal, tax and other asset valuation complexities.

We all know and have seen many cases of dysfunction in the family business. This is often caused by muddled involvement of sons and daughters brought into the business in a less than successful manner.

### Avoiding politics & nepotism

Employees often think the owners' children get preference, which they often do. Attracting and retaining high-performing, non-family employees is often made more difficult by the perception that preference is given to family members when it comes to career advancement.

Throughout my career either owning a family business, working in a family business and now consulting with family businesses, I've observed and studied its idiosyncrasies. Experience has taught me that the following work best when bringing your children into the company.

#### 1. Let your children make their own choices.

Give them opportunities to do odd jobs around the company appropriate to their interest and skill sets and allow their interests and passion to develop organically.

#### 2. Starting them at the bottom works best.

Coach them on how other employees will watch them and set higher expectations for their performance because of who they are. Establish clearly defined compensation structures based on merit and abilities, not familial relationships. Reward them for sweat equity and call them out on arrogance. Do not tolerate condescending behavior. Roles and responsibilities must be clearly defined.

**3. Formal education and on-the-job learning/training go hand in hand.** Require them to develop professional skills through college horticultural or business programs, in combination with working in the business.

**4. Encourage them to work for another landscaping company.** Either during college or upon graduation, allow them to work somewhere else. It can be a really valuable building block for creating a well-rounded experience base from which to build.

**5. Establish criteria for job performance.** Use good management practices to keep standards high. Keep a balance between holding your family member to a high standard for performance and being too demanding and never satisfied. The other employees are already holding them to a higher standard. Avoid making it a no-win for your children to share in your business. Make the process personally rewarding.

**6. Change your thinking from your son or daughter "replacing" you to "complementing" you.** Some of the more successful transitions occur when the second-generation family member brings special talents to the leadership mix that adds value to or augments the owner's capabilities, making him or her more of a partner in the business than a threat. For example, if, as the owner, you're operationally focused, your family member might have talents in technology, finance or marketing/sales.

Despite some of the above difficulties, some companies make smooth generational transitions. In fact, sometimes the next generation leader takes the company to higher levels.



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# THE BENCHMARK

KEVIN KEHOE

The author, owner-manager of 3PG Consulting, is a 25-year industry veteran. Reach him at kkehoe@earthlink.net.

## Revenue growth: How do you compare?

**A**re you wondering how the industry fared in 2012? And how you did by comparison? Over the course of the next few months, the consultants at 3PG Consulting will provide answers to these two questions in this monthly column.

In this first of the series, I'll share information on industry revenue growth, the strategies that worked and some predictions for 2013. The information is derived from the 3PG Consulting's client base. We looked at 30 companies (randomly selected out of more than 100) to compile this for you.

Table 1 shows the results of the benchmark analysis. The average revenue growth rate from 2011 to 2012 was 8 percent. This average disguises some very high and low growth rates.

Table 2 breaks out growth rates by annual revenue size and clearly shows the most robust growth took place in companies with less than \$5 million in annual revenue. If we sort the information by region, the lowest growth rates took place in snow markets and the highest growth rates occurred in non-snow markets. If you're in a snow market, this in fact might be your experience.

What can we learn from these figures?

1. There's still growth and solid conditions in most markets, especially for smaller to medium-size players.

2. It's really hard to grow a larger business at high growth rates. This is the result of the continued slowdown in overall economic growth. In most markets there's still precious little construction and new development to drive big dollar growth.

3. The highest-growth companies invested money in employing customer relationship management (CRM) systems, like BOSS or Sales-Force.com, sales management programs (putting someone in charge of the sales team) and sales force training (coaching business development and account management staff in time management and face-to-face skills).

4. While there's still low pricing by some industry participants, this strategy was not the tactic that drove sales growth rates for the high performers.

What drove growth? It was targeted and assertive direct sales force efforts. Period. Companies that invested in sharpening the marketing message, the lead-generation machine and negotiating tactics did well. In other words, an investment in No. 3 above paid off last year—finally.

### What can we expect in 2013?

1. Market growth may not be robust, but it will be steady enough to support 10 percent growth in most markets.

2. CRM systems will continue to be a good investment—driving sales team productivity and effectiveness.

3. Increasing customer loyalty will present a selling challenge. "Taking business away" from competitors will get harder. There was a clear improvement in retention rates in 2012 in most markets. This trend will continue.

4. The biggest risk to growth might be cheap money and rising real estate values. Cheap money combined with rising values is leading to consolidation in the property management business. And anything that happens in that business affects our business.

Overall, I expect another year like 2012 in 2013—at least on the revenue growth side.

TABLE 1: REVENUE GROWTH OVERALL

2011 revenue	2012 revenue	Average growth	Highest growth	Lowest growth
230,565,723	249,090,541	8%	32.4%	-17.3%

TABLE 2: REVENUE GROWTH BY REVENUE SIZE

Under \$3 million	\$3 million - \$5 million	\$5 million - \$10 million	\$10 million-plus
14.8%	20.4%	7.8%	10.3%



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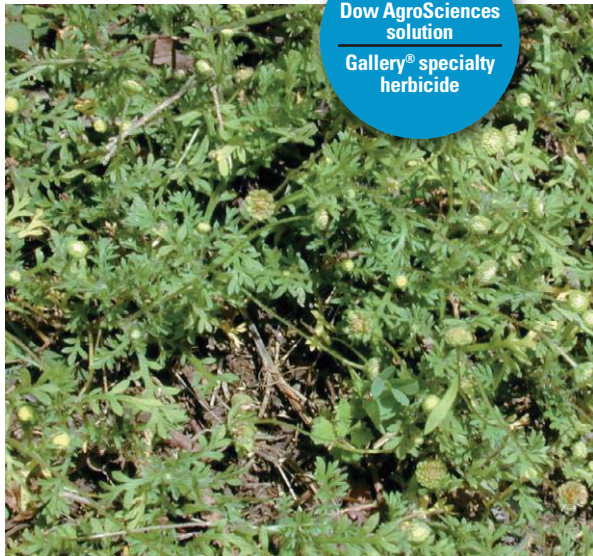
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## SOUTHERN BRASS BUTTONS *Cotula australis*

### IDENTIFICATION TIPS

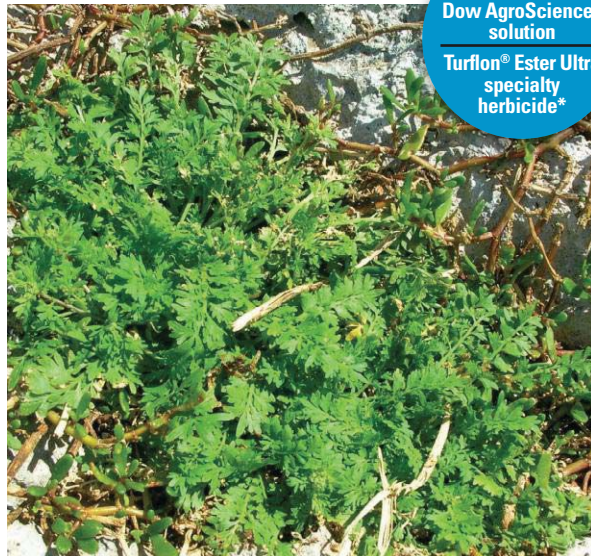
- ▶ This low-growing annual is often confused with swinecress, thanks to its similar leaves and flower heads. Swinecress has a skunk-like odor; brass buttons has no odor.
- ▶ Its seed leaves are long, narrow and fleshy, and the first true leaves are divided into three narrow lobes.
- ▶ Small, pale yellow flowers cluster into heads atop long stalks and bloom from January through May.
- ▶ In mature plants, finely dissected leaves are

sparsely covered with short hairs. They're arranged alternately along the stem on short stalks.

- ▶ This member of the sunflower family is commonly found along the coast from California to Washington.

### CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Its broad leaves can take over a large area quickly, so it's important to treat this weed early.
- ▶ Apply a preemergent herbicide containing isoxaben prior to germination, followed by 0.5 in. of irrigation.



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## LESSER SWINECRESS *Coronopus didymus*

### IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This member of the mustard family is a low-growing, prostrate winter or summer annual that's often confused with southern brass buttons.
- ▶ First and later leaves alternate along the stems. The edges have one or more rounded, coarse teeth, and there are short hairs on the tips. Its leaves also have a skunk-like odor.
- ▶ Small white, four-petaled flower clusters bloom from February through October.

### CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ This quick-spreading weed is often found in lawns and gardens throughout the U.S. and is common in newly seeded fescue. Prolific seed production, tolerance to low mowing and heavy traffic have increased the prevalence of this weed in turfgrass.
- ▶ Apply a preemergent herbicide containing isoxaben early in the season or a postemergent herbicide containing triclopyr to emerged swinecress in late winter or early spring.

\* State restrictions on the sale and use of Turflon Ester Ultra apply.

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# THE 7 HABITS OF HIGHLY EFFECTIVE FAMILY BUSINESSES\*

Practical Advice  
from Experts & Execs

\*  
In the Green Industry

"When everything's running right, there's nothing better than a family business. When it's not, it's really tough."



BY **MARISA PALMIERI**

“**W**hen everything’s running right, there’s nothing better than a family business,” says Paul Sessions, director of the

University of New Haven’s Center for Family Business in Connecticut. “When it’s not, it’s really tough.”



Chances are, as a member of the Green Industry, you either own, work for, or have owned or worked for a family business at one point or another. In fact, more than two-thirds of respondents to the *Landscape Management Family Business Survey*, conducted in January, said they consider theirs to be a family business.



Because family business dynamics can be so difficult and there’s so much riding on them, we surveyed Green Industry professionals in family enterprises to find out their pain points. Next, we sought out family business experts and other landscape executives in the trenches to identify best practices. The result is this feature story—inspired by none other than Stephen Covey’s iconic *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*, which has motivated so many business people since it was first published in 1989.



Read on for seven takeaways to better your business and your family relations.

prior to the meeting. In addition to going over day-to-day and operational concerns, the Moores incorporate mentoring into this time to train Bruce Jr. to lead the company forward.

“I put together a list of items, from financial aspects of the company to operations, that we try to touch on each week or in multiple weeks,” Moore Sr. says. “For instance, we’ll talk about cash flow, financial benchmarks and how to know what to look for.”

Brett Lemcke, the heir apparent of R.M. Landscape, says paying attention to how you speak to each other is important. It’s something his family’s business learned the hard way. His father and uncle, a former business partner, had a “bad split,” due in part to poor communication, he says.

“It was a difficult time for us from a family standpoint,” Lemcke says. “Maybe in response to that, my father and I try not to put ourselves in that situation.”

He says he and his father (who sometimes have “heated debates”) learned the importance of talking through concerns constructively rather than yelling or avoiding problems.

## HABIT

# 1

### Communicate clearly

“The failure to communicate well complicates everything,” Sessions says. Healthy family businesses create situations so family members aren’t afraid to communicate, he says. How? No. 1, they

set up ways to communicate regularly. “One thing I see many family businesses not doing is meeting within the business other than on the fly or casually,” Sessions says. “Sit down formally once a week.”

At the advice of an executive coach, Eastern Land Management’s Bruce Moore Sr. and his son, Bruce Jr., have been doing just that for about a year.

Each week they have an agenda, which is a shared file they both update

## HABIT

# 2

### Define family members’ roles

It’s no wonder communication is challenging, says Matthew DiGeronimo, who runs a Honolulu-based mergers and acquisitions firm and hosts a radio show geared toward small and family busi-



## COVER STORY

nesses. Roles and job descriptions are often poorly defined.

“Often, we work with family businesses that have a difficult time describing who does what, who gets paid for what and how the business would be structured in terms of responsibilities and pay if they were not family,” he says. Failure to define roles is problematic because it makes it difficult to create a foundation that supports growth and it creates complexity if or when the family wants to sell the business or bring on a partner, DiGeronimo says.

Kim Lewey of Lewey Landscaping & LawnCare and her husband and business partner, Mike, have found success by splitting up duties.

“You have to learn to separate responsibilities so you’re not stepping on each others’ toes,” she says. For example, Lewey is a former bank senior vice president. Naturally, she handles finance and marketing,

while her husband, a former grounds maintenance supervisor for a development company, oversees the crews and operations. Even families that don’t have as clear-cut backgrounds can play to individuals’ strong points, she says.

“You need to not only understand your limitations but also your strengths,” Lewey says. “And know when to get help with areas that may not be your forte or your partner’s forte.”

## HABIT 3

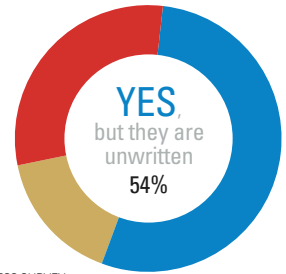
### Have a solid succession plan

Nearly a third of *LM* Family Business Survey respondents named succession concerns as one of the top challenges of operating a family business (see chart on

### DO FAMILY MEMBERS IN YOUR BUSINESS HAVE CLEARLY DEFINED ROLES AND JOB DESCRIPTIONS?

**YES**  
and they  
are written  
down  
30%

**NO** 16%



SOURCE:  
*LMS* FAMILY BUSINESS SURVEY

page 30). Sixty-nine percent have no succession plan at all (see chart on page 26).

Chris Senske knows first hand how the lack of a transition plan can cause stress among the younger generation. His parents are the founders of his company, Senske Lawn & Tree Care; he joined them full time in the 1970s, shortly after graduating from the University of Washington with a degree in chemistry.

Throughout his 20s, Senske frequently worked 60 to 70 hours a week with no overtime pay. His parents often called him at home after quitting hours about “seemingly unimportant” questions and issues. Occasionally, when cash flow issues popped up, he’d receive no paycheck at all—“something no regular employees would ever endure or accept,” he says.

Senske felt he wasn’t being fairly compensated. With no plan mapped out for the future, he reached a breaking point where he began experiencing physical stress systems.

“I kind of cracked and asked for a family meeting,” Senske says. “I told my folks that there had to be a change and we needed to work on a transition plan as a reward for my efforts. Though the phone calls never stopped, a plan to transition ownership was made.”

In any business there needs to be a clear expectation of what the transition plan will be, Senske says. “There also needs to be a clear compensation program that’s fair to all parties,” he says.

As for a transition to the next generation, Senske’s children do not work in the businesses. When it became apparent to team members there wouldn’t be a third generation of family

*continued on page 26*

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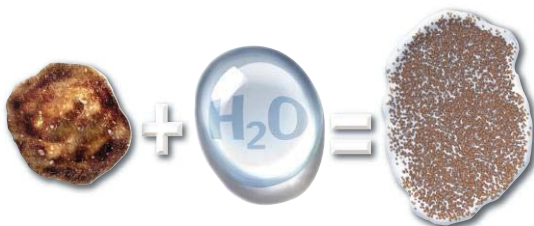


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## COVER STORY

*continued from page 24*

ownership and Senske had no immediate plans to sell or exit, he created a long-term strategy that he shared with his leadership team.

"I communicated a 20-year plan, which included developing a new, next generation leadership cohort that can manage the business whether it's for me,

my family or new owners," he says.

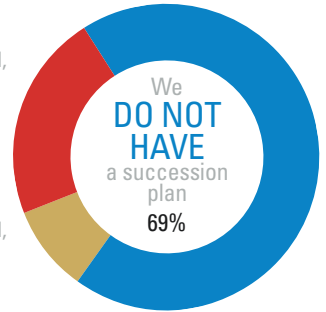
Although he says his parents were well taken care of and his relationship with them always remained strong, in true family business fashion, Senske still harbors guilt for putting what he calls "undue pressure" on his folks about the transition.

Those are precisely the feelings

## HOW DO YOU DEFINE YOUR PLAN FOR SUCCESSION?

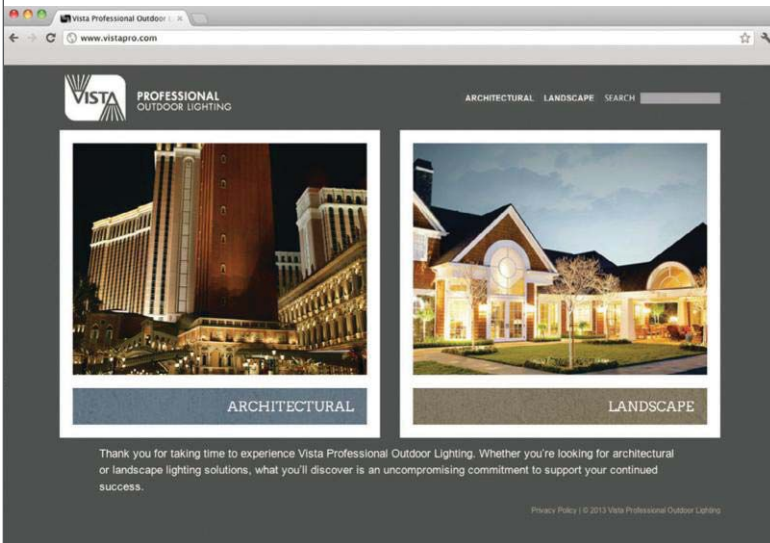
We **HAVE** a well-defined, but not written down, succession plan **22%**

We **HAVE** a well-defined, written down succession plan **9%**



SOURCE: LMS FAMILY BUSINESS SURVEY

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healthy family businesses can avoid, says Barbara Fisher, president and lead consultant with Fisher Business Management in Portland, Ore.

The older generation in a business should consider the succession plan early. "They should set their son or daughter up to get increasing responsibility and accountability in the company, while earning a fair wage," she says. At the same time, the younger generation should consider whether they're adding significant value to the business and create a buy-out situation for their parent. "Do not expect a parent to simply hand over the business out of love," Fisher says. "A sale is likely their parents' retirement plan, and it should be treated as such."

## HABIT 4

### Hire for skill, not relationships

Nepotism is the No. 1 culprit undermining unhealthy family businesses, says consultant Raymond Suarez of Quality Management International, based in Suitland, Md. "All healthy family businesses—emphasis on the word 'healthy'—go out of their way to ensure employees understand and believe that rewards and recognition are a function of merit and performance, not relationships," he says.

That's something Lemcke is conscious of. From as long as he can remember he's wanted to be involved in the family business, working there during summers from a young age, but

he was determined to bring value to the company and not just take up space. After receiving a bachelor's degree in landscape development from the State University of New York's College of Agriculture and Technology at Cobleskill, he interned for three months at Gachina Landscape Management in Menlo Park, Calif., and he quickly became involved in trade associations on state and national levels.

The internship was a particularly useful experience for Lemcke, and though working outside the family business for some time wasn't a mandate of his business, that practice is becoming common, Session says.

"Some family businesses make it a rule that a young person can't come into the business whenever they want to," Sessions says. "They say you have to work elsewhere from two to five years. Some say it has to be in a comparable company and others say it doesn't. The point is, you have to tolerate what it means to work for others not related to you."

Additionally, he says it's important to allow family members to enter the business only when there's a "real job" to be done.

Dan Dahlkemper, the second-generation owner of Dahlkemper Landscape Architects & Contractors, says children in family businesses should work somewhere else a) because they can learn a lot from other companies, and b) to understand working for other people isn't all it's cracked up to be.

Dahlkemper himself grew up working in the business his father founded. After receiving his bachelor's degree in

landscape architecture from Penn State University in 1980, he worked for firms in Maryland, New York and Texas before returning to the family business in 1986 and eventually acquired ownership.

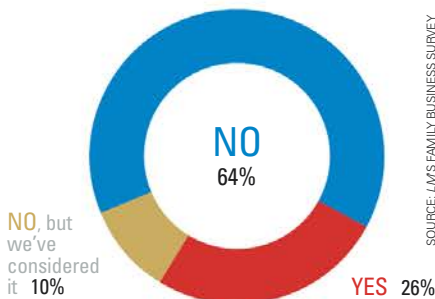
Finally, Sessions says family business managers need to be ready and able to discipline family workers—including letting them go—if they're

not meeting standards.

"If they're not cutting it, you've got a problem and everybody notices," he says.

More than a quarter of Green Industry family businesses have fired a family member, according to LM's Family Business Survey. Ten percent have considered it but haven't pulled the trigger.

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**Dan Dahlkemper**  
*Owner, Dahlkemper Landscape Architects & Contractors / Erie, Pa.*

Founded: 1955  
 Annual revenue: \$3.5 million

**FAMILY INVOLVED**  
 Dahlkemper succeeded his father, Chuck, as the owner of the business. Other family members serve as key managers.



**Pat Donovan**  
*Owner, Classic Landscaping / Edison, N.J.*

Founded: 1983  
 Annual revenue: \$300,000

**FAMILY INVOLVED**  
 Donovan's four sons, Patrick, Taylor, Brendan and Brian, have worked in the business during summers and intermittently after graduating.



**Brett Lemcke**  
*Vice president, R.M. Landscape / Hilton, N.Y.*

Founded: 1973  
 Annual revenue: not reported

**FAMILY INVOLVED**  
 Lemcke works for his father, Rick, who founded the firm. They employ various family members.

## THE FAMILY PANEL

A look at the Green Industry execs, quoted throughout this story, who opened up to *LM* about family business.

### HABIT 5

#### Separate work and family life

Separating work and family—or “church and state,” as Lemcke calls it, is the toughest aspect of a family business,

according to the *LM* Family Business Survey. (See chart on page 30.)

“I’m still always challenged not to have conversations about work on the weekend or during family time,” Lemcke says. “I love talking about the businesses, but it’s about trying to make sure we’re not always talking about it.”

Successful family businesses find ways to celebrate together, such as having dinner together every Sunday, Sessions says. “They really enjoy their families as something distinct from their business,” he says, noting some families wouldn’t know what to talk about if they weren’t talking about business. He says that’s not a healthy way to behave, and if that’s the case, he suggests instituting a rule about not discussing work at home.

Bruce Moore Sr. says his family learned that rule early on from a family business group. “At the end of the day when we go home and have dinner, business isn’t discussed,” he says. “It gets left outside the door, and I think that’s worked pretty well.”

Lewey and her husband instituted a rule about no work talk on “date nights.” “If one of us brings it up, all we have to do is hold up a finger and that means stop,” she says.

Classic Landscaping’s Pat Donovan says his four sons, who’ve worked with him off and on throughout their high school and college careers and have been his only employees, are the ones who keep him in check.


“If I get going about work on an off day they’ll say, ‘Dad, you told us we were going to be off today, why are we talking about work?’” he says. “You have to pull the plug at some point. I have to remember what’s important to them, and they’re grown up enough to say, ‘Let’s not talk about it.’”


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### Kim Lewey

Co-owner, Lewey Landscaping & LawnCare / Raleigh, N.C.

Founded: 2001  
Annual revenue: \$500,000

#### FAMILY INVOLVED

Lewey's husband, Mike, is co-owner; their daughter, Jordan, is working with them on a short-term basis.



### Bruce Moore Sr.

CEO, Eastern Land Management / Stamford, Conn.

Founded: 1976  
Annual revenue: \$6.7 million

#### FAMILY INVOLVED

Moore's son Bruce Moore Jr. serves as vice president of operations; he's been full time since graduating from college six years ago.



### Chris Senske

President, Senske Lawn & Tree Care / Kennewick, Wash.

Founded: 1947  
Annual revenue: \$21.6 million

#### FAMILY INVOLVED

Second-generation owner; no children involved in the business.



### Clark Tomlinson

President, Tomlinson Bomberger / Lancaster, Pa.

Founded: 1981  
Annual revenue: \$8 million

#### FAMILY INVOLVED

Tomlinson's wife, Beth, is co-owner and executive administrator; son Greg is an account manager; and daughter Elizabeth is the receptionist.

## » WEB EXTRA WEB EXTRA WEB EXTRA WEB EXTRA WEB EXTRA «

Are you feeling trapped in the family business? Visit the Web Extras section of [LandscapeManagement.net](http://LandscapeManagement.net) for advice from psychologist Michael Klein, author of *Trapped in the Family Business*. Plus, more charts and insights from LM's Family Business Survey.

# HABIT 6

## Treat family and non-family workers equally

One component of a successful family business is proving internally that family workers and non-family workers are treated equally, Sessions says. In the *LM* Family Business Survey, 90 percent of respondents say they treat family and non-family workers equally.

"Younger generation members have to be above reproach in how

they handle themselves and expect that more will be expected of them," Sessions says. In fact, they should be coached on the "fish bowl that is a family business," he says.

"I'm very conscious that my son doesn't get any special treatment, and he's very good about it, as well," says Clark Tomlinson, owner of Tomlinson Bomberger. His son Greg works as a sales account manager. He's worked for the firm part-time since he was 16, joining full-time after college about seven years ago. The father-son team is working with a succession-planning coach to set the

stage for Greg to gain ownership.

"I'm always juggling, trying to be fair and equitable, and I've tried to hold higher expectations for him," Tomlinson says. "In a family business, you need to prove yourself, be reliable and have a good work ethic. The good news is he seems to be respected by his peers."

Tomlinson Bomberger has a few practices in place to promote this balance. For one, the younger Tomlinson calls his parents Clark and Beth vs. Dad and Mom at work to create a separation. He picked up the tip from a family business seminar.

"My son has evolved to that and it's worked out well," Tomlinson says.

Additionally, as a rule, family members don't report to family members. (Tomlinson's wife, Beth, is the company's executive administrator and his daughter Elizabeth is the receptionist.) "It's easier said than done, and it



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### Daniel S. Gordon, CPA

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## COVER STORY

### WHAT ARE THE TOP CHALLENGES OF OPERATING A FAMILY BUSINESS?

*(respondents could select more than one choice)*

**48%** Maintaining a **PERSONAL RELATIONSHIP** outside of work with family coworkers

**10%** **POWER STRUGGLES** among family members in the business

**23%** **MANAGING** subordinate family members in the business

**16%** **CONFLICT** between family members and non-family employees

**32%** **SUCCESSION** concerns

**19%** **OTHER** \*

*\* Responses include variations of the following: none; finding employees; there are no successors; fulfilling family members' expectations; paying taxes/bills; and family members' lack of interest.*

probably creates a challenge for the managers, but we've had those conversations and said we'd do it by the book," Tomlinson says. "I remind the managers to take the family out of the equation and proceed as if they're any coworker."

back to his father's business but is content with where he stands today. "My dad had always put a lot of pressure on me to come back into the business," he says. "I just couldn't work for him—he's very type A and I'm not that way. My management style is fairly different. When I bought in, it was at 51 percent."

None of his five children works in his business, although they have at times.

"We told them all to pursue their interests, and there's nobody who's really interested in the business," he says. "As a parent you want your kids to be happy. If they're not going to be happy, then it's not for them. I don't want them to do it for my sake. Sure, succession becomes a concern, but I have some great people who've been here for a while. I'm starting to bring a partner in to plan for the future."

Tomlinson says it's important to emphasize to children that they're welcome if they have an interest, but not to have a mandate. Three of his children have other careers. He says because the door's always been open, there's no friction among family members who are in the business and those who are not.

"We've all made our own decisions and everyone's OK with that," he says. **LM**

## HABIT 7

### Don't pressure your children to join you

Nearly a third of non-founding family business members in the landscape industry say they've felt pressure to join the family business.

Senske is one of them. At the time he joined the company, his father needed someone to run his four-person businesses while he recovered from major surgery. Senske's siblings had already started other careers or lived out of town. "I was the only real choice," he says. Although he felt pressure, he's happy with the way things turned out, and he's glad he landed where he did.

Likewise, Dahlkemper felt the pull

**METHODOLOGY** // We surveyed 8,980 random *Landscape Management* readers via email in January, garnering 474 responses, for the *LM* Family Business Survey. The statistics presented throughout this report come from that research. More than two-thirds (67 percent) of respondents say they consider their firms to be family businesses. Those who did not indicate they work in family businesses—155 people—were prevented from answering the rest of the survey.

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BROWSE ROOMS ▾

# THE INS & OUTS OF houzz

This online platform may give residential landscape designers and design/build firms a boost.

BY **DIANNA BORSI O'BRIEN**

**Matthew Cunningham** of Boston-based Matthew Cunningham Landscape Design knows why he's smitten with **Houzz.com**, a free, online visual portfolio that links professionals like him to homeowners seeking to improve their homes, inside or outside.

Having promoted his business on the website for 18 months now, Houzz has brought Cunningham five new clients and projects diverse in scope and style. Cunningham marvels that for one project he acquired through the website, he developed a complete master plan for a home in Maine, even though the client was based in Texas. That arrangement may sound like a logistical nightmare, but Cunningham says Houzz made it easy for him to see what his Texas clients wanted based on the examples saved in their Houzz accounts.

## What's Houzz?

Essentially, it's an online platform that connects homeowners to designers and home improvement professionals. Founded in 2009, Houzz was founded by a husband and wife who were renovating their home and grew frustrated

## HOW TO SAY HOUZZ

The "Hou" in Houzz is pronounced "how"—Houzz is a combination of the words "house" and "buzz."



at the lack of tools for finding good ideas and professionals to get the job done. So they developed their own. A year later, they quit their day jobs. Houzz grew more than 450 percent in 2012 to 12 million monthly unique users. In late January, the site launched Houzz Pro+, a paid marketing program for professional users, which has sold out in several major markets.

The site itself is free and anyone can create a profile, upload images or gather ideas or inspiration. Once visitors create an account, they also can create “Ideabooks,” where they may stash photographs for later reference and keep them private or public. For homeowners, it puts an end to tearing out magazine pictures to share with designers and contractors. For professionals, it provides inspiration, a glimpse into clients’ desires and a way to share design ideas.

When professionals upload images of their work to Houzz, those photos are linked directly back to their profiles, making it easy for viewers to find out more about the service providers—and access their contact information once they’re ready to make their move. The site also includes discussion boards and places for professional-homeowner interaction.

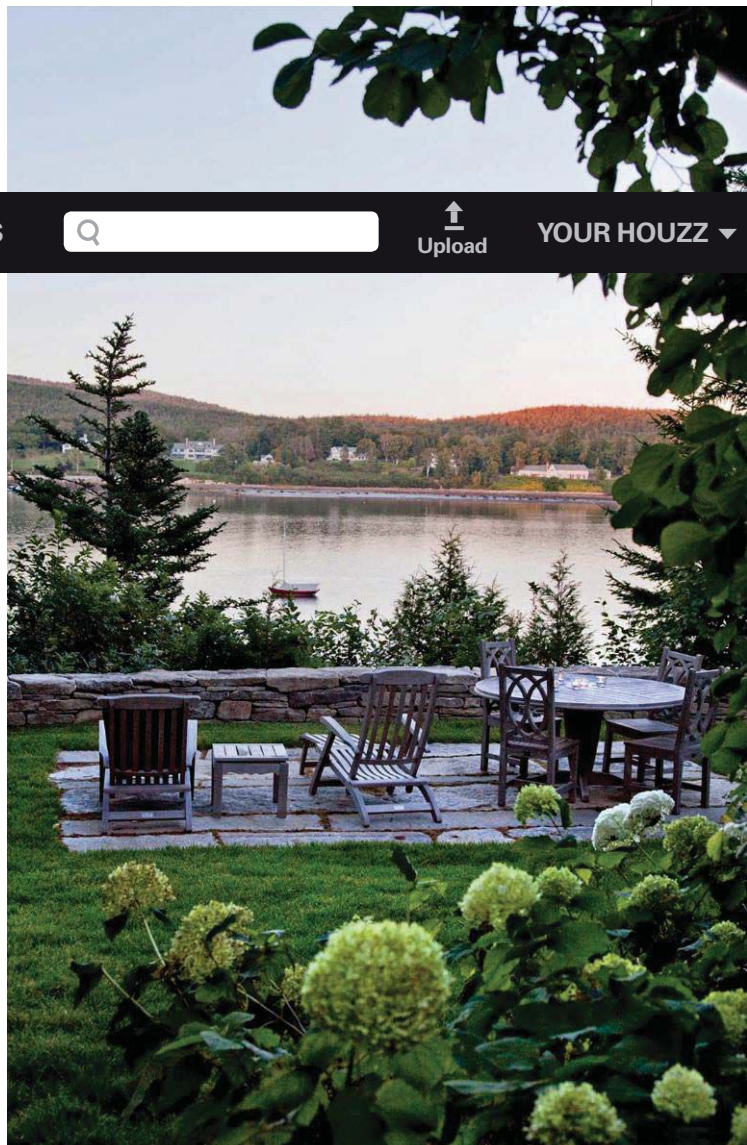
Who visits Houzz? According to the site, 89 percent of its viewers are homeowners with an average home value of \$450,000. Research shows these viewers plan to spend \$5,900 on a deck or porch addition or alteration within two years and \$7,600 on a patio or landscape addition or replacement.

## Should you use Houzz?

As of press time, there were nearly 13,700 landscape contractors and 4,600 landscape architects/designers with professional profiles on Houzz. The site may be useful for any Green Industry professional who has excellent photos of its work—but it shines when it comes to spotlighting designers and design/builders.

Luckily, professionals don’t need to be tech savvy to use Houzz. Jamyn Simonik is the point person for Houzz at Smalls Landscaping in Valparaiso, Ind. She calls it “easy peasy” and not time consuming, unless you fall into the black hole of searching the site’s more than 1 million images. She estimates she spends 30 minutes a week on updates and says if you know enough to put .com at the end of an email, you can use Houzz.

Even Cunningham, who prefers to do his individual master plan drawings by hand on paper for each of the 20 to 30 residential projects he does each season, finds the site user friendly. But make no mistake: The site is about images,



East Coast-based landscape designer Matthew Cunningham has met clients from across the country via Houzz.

Opposite: Smalls Landscaping, which designs and builds residential landscapes in Indiana, appointed CAD specialist Jamyn Simonik to strengthen its Houzz presence.

and that’s where Cunningham has a leg up; he’s a photographer as well as a landscape designer.

Those with excellent photographs have an advantage because it’s more likely viewers will “save” them or comment on them. The site’s algorithm also takes into account keywords, descriptions, comments, questions and the presence of price tags, says Liza Hausman, vice president of community at Houzz. All of these factors drive a firm’s images to the front page of the site, thus exposing the professional’s name to the forefront of homeowners’ views.

## Many uses

Karen Chapman, owner of Seattle-based firm Le Jardin, which specializes in residential container and small



## ON THE WEB

garden design, was too busy to look into Houzz until she was asked to write for the site in September as its Pacific Northwest regional garden writer. The coauthor of *Fine Foliage*, a soon-to-be-published book on ways to combine foliage in gardens and containers, Chapman writes for Houzz, turning out Ideabooks on topics related to landscaping in the Northwest, container gardening and color-focused design. Once she took a look at the site, Chapman says she was thrilled with its resources. She taps Houzz to create “look at this” Ideabooks for clients. Chapman says it’s better than showing a client an on-site slide show, partly because they may view it anytime they want to, even “11 p.m. at night.”

Like Chapman, Nancy Marshall, co-owner of Smalls Landscaping, a winner of

For **8 tips** on getting started with and making the most of Houzz.com, check out p. 36.



Smalls Landscaping won a Best of Houzz 2013 Customer Satisfaction award, which is based on homeowner ratings.

a Best of Houzz 2013 Customer Satisfaction award—uses the site for inspiration, discovery and to display the company’s mainly residential work.

She first took a look at the site after a client told her about it. “I was blown away,” she says. “Four hours later, I

*continued on page 38*

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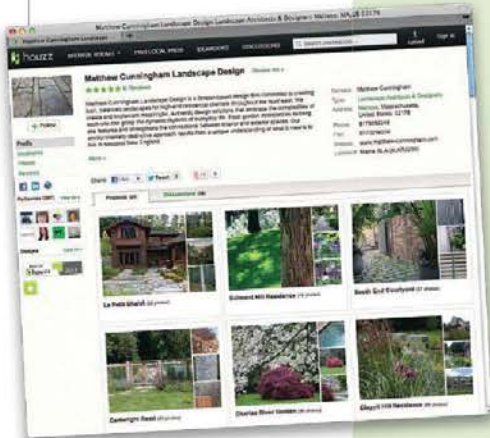
THE WRIGHT WAY TO MOW





# HOW TO USE houzz

Getting started on **Houzz.com** and making the most of this free, online visual portfolio is easy—if you know how. Start with these tips.



The first step is creating a profile on Houzz, like Matthew Cunningham's above.

Opposite: Karen Chapman, owner of design firm Le Jardin et, writes and creates Ideabooks for Houzz.

**1 DON'T BE AFRAID.** Dive in to creating a profile, and if problems crop up, Houzz offers free resources, videos and tutorials, including how to take the photographs you'll need to get noticed. If online help isn't for you, real people answer the telephone at Houzz and they're willing to help.

**2 START WITH GREAT IMAGES.** Remember Houzz is a visual portfolio. Liza Hausman, vice president of community for Houzz, recommends uploading at least 10 images. A primary way your company's images rise to the top of the site is based on how often they're added to Ideabooks. The more beautiful your images, the more likely they are to be added to others' Ideabooks. If you

don't have sharp images, get them, advises Ken Lewis of ClientExpander, an internet marketing firm. If the cost is holding you up, he suggests turning to Craigslist.org or a local college to find an aspiring photographer. He also suggests bartering with a professional photographer to get good images of your work. "If the image is not crisp and clear, no one is going to put it in their Ideabook," he says.

**3 USE IMAGES YOU ALREADY HAVE.** But make sure they are yours to use. Many firms have photographs of past projects already sitting on their shelves, but Brianne Dawson, marketing manager of Marketri, says ensure you own the rights to them. If the images were taken by a photographer outside of your firm, in addition to gain-



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ing permission to use them, you may want to offer him or her a photo credit for the images via a small watermark.

#### 4 WRITE GREAT CAPTIONS.

They should tell a story and add context, Lewis says. A good caption hooks viewers and makes it more likely they'll share the image and add it to their Ideabooks. Include keywords in the captions, as they also can raise your ranking.

#### 5 ASK CLIENTS TO WRITE REVIEWS.

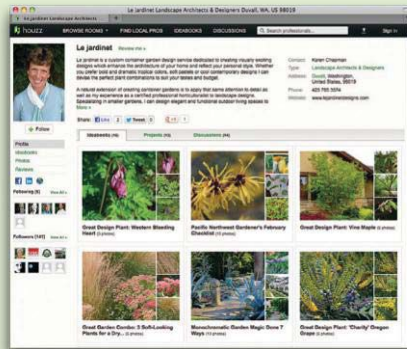
And make it easy for them. Lewis suggests handing out business cards at the end of successful jobs, thanking them and asking specifically for a review on Houzz (don't forget to include a direct URL). You even can offer to write something yourself and ask them to approve it. Such testimonials give you online credentials and as Dawson notes, "People love to read testimonials and people trust them. When they trust you, they'll reach out to you when they're ready to do business."

#### 6 ASK FRIENDS, FAMILY AND CLIENTS TO ADD YOUR IMAGES TO THEIR IDEABOOKS.

Don't be shy. Remember, the formula for top ranks includes how many Ideabooks your images are added to.

#### 7 BE PROACTIVE, ENGAGE AND PARTICIPATE.

Your profile on Houzz gets a boost through your interaction. Give yourself a leg up by getting involved in communities and discussions and by sharing your expertise. Dawson suggests looking for questions



you can answer. This interaction gives homeowners insight into how you work and your personality. And if they like your attitude, they'll be more likely to contact you. Designate a person or set time aside to steer your Houzz activity. At Smalls Landscaping, Houzz point person Jamyn Simonik uploads new photographs and keeps tabs on user questions. Matthew Cunningham of Matthew Cunningham Landscape Design sets time aside at the end of each day to answer questions and such, which he can do from anywhere via the site's mobile apps.

#### 8 CONSIDER A PROFESSIONAL.

Rather work outdoors than on a computer? Those who are unsure about navigating the site may want to enlist an expert, says Lewis. If you decide to go pro for your Houzz efforts, make sure the consultant has expertise with Internet marketing and search engine optimization for your type of business—and that he or she's not learning on *your* job.



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## ON THE WEB

*continued from page 34*

was addicted.” The firm, with \$3 million in annual revenue, prides itself on unusual designs, and Houzz gives Marshall and her partner and sister, Becky Whitacre, easy access to the unique plants and ideas they like.

“We like to think way outside the box,” says Whitacre. One of her first searches was for visual ideas for building a “Hobbit house” landscape. A train garden was another focus for a Houzz search.



Landscaper designer Matthew Cunningham says Houzz makes good design “relevant.”

Smalls has been using Houzz for less than a year, but Simonik, the CAD specialist who keeps the company’s Houzz

profile and Ideabooks updated, says it’s worth the time spent even if a user hasn’t garnered business directly from it yet.

“It’s exactly what we do,” she says. “We’re a design firm and it lets clients see what we do and it helps clients decide what they want.”

It also saves the firm time on the telephone, says Simonik. Instead of answering those random questions, such as “when should trees be trimmed,” many of those answers are either available on Houzz or Smalls can answer a client’s questions easily through the site.

Cunningham also appreciates the ability to connect with clients and answer questions from anywhere, anytime.

“It has made my connections with clients stronger,” he says. He values the site as an advertising medium more so than regional print magazines. He predicts the site will give the landscape design/build industry a boost by helping clients realize the importance of design and landscaping—and getting the job done right the first time.

“Houzz makes the importance of design relevant and shows people what a good designed space looks like,” says Cunningham. **L.M.**

---

*O’Brien is a freelance writer based in Columbia, Mo. She is now addicted to Houzz.*

PHOTO: MATTHEW CUNNINGHAM/LANDSCAPE DESIGN

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# MARKET WATCH

## IRRIGATION

# Water reincarnated

Use of recycled water in landscaping is slowly catching on, researchers say.

By BETH GERACI

**W**hen Rain Bird's 2013 Intelligent Use of Water Summit took place in January at Michigan State University, the focus was on water conservation in the golf course and sports turf industries. But that doesn't mean there weren't takeaways for landscape contractors.

A speaker at the event, University of California researcher Ali Harivandi, Ph.D., urged golf course superintendent attendees to consider using reclaimed water—water that's treated and cleaned at sewage treatment plants—instead of potable water for irrigation in the face of a worldwide water shortage.

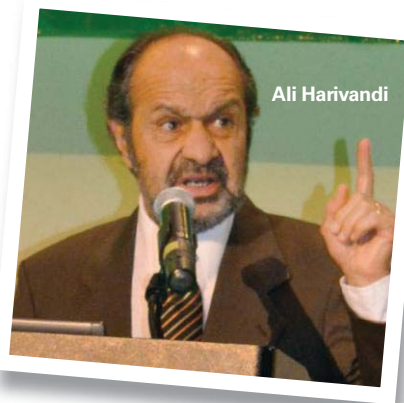
It's a growing trend in the golf course industry, and in a recent phone interview, Harivandi told *LM* that it's slowly catching on in the commercial landscaping business too, especially out West.

All you need is for a pipeline to run from the sewage treatment plant to someplace near the commercial property and you're in business. And in states such as California, Florida, Texas and Colorado, "they're getting more into it," Harivandi said. "As people learn more about it and

the infrastructure is built and as treatment plants remove more salt from the water, within 30 years I wouldn't be surprised to see that all the water in Los Angeles Basin were being reused."

Sewage treatment plants are highly regulated by a government or quasi-government body, Harivandi said, and the water is disinfected heavily by chemicals or different types of gases. Still, reclaimed water use in the commercial landscaping industry is problematic on two levels, he stressed. For one, the infrastructure to irrigate with it in many cases has yet to be built. And not many sewage treatment plants remove saline from the water, because doing so is expensive and requires much energy and fossil fuel use.

Because commercial landscapes generally are home to a diversity of plants, shrubs, flowers and turf that have different levels of saline tolerance, irrigating them with reclaimed water is complicated. On the other hand, if the water is going to a golf course where the acreage is all turfgrass, "it's more straightforward than if it goes to a mixed landscape or botanic garden where plants have different salt tolerances," Harivandi said.



PG 39

**IRRIGATION** Reclaimed water use in landscaping is on the rise

PG 40

**DESIGN/BUILD** One owner finds the perfect work/life balance

PG 42

**MAINTENANCE** Lawn clippings do have their benefits

PG 44

**LAWN/TREE CARE** Meet Ohio's Applicator of the Year

## FLORIDA WATER SURVEY SAYS...

Despite the challenges, a new survey out of Florida shows Floridians are interested in recycled water use, too—residentially.

The University of Florida Institute of Food and Agricultural Sciences conducted a water survey in December, the results of which were released last month.

The survey, which had nothing to do with the Rain Bird Summit, was done on behalf of the Gainesville-based Center for Public Issues Education (PIE Center). It asked nearly 500 residents for their views on 16 water-related topics.

"We were pleasantly surprised by the water conservation efforts Floridians are willing to make," said Alexa Lamm, an assistant professor at the University of Florida, who headed up the survey.

The survey showed that 65.3 percent of respondents were willing to use recycled wastewater for irrigation—more than administrators expected. But only 20.3 percent of them said they have access to recycled wastewater. Survey results did not indicate what type of recycled wastewater residents do or don't have access to, however.

"We're hopeful that if decision makers know that the public is willing to use [recycled wastewater], they'll be more proactive in trying to make it more readily available," said Lamm of the encouraging results. "We're always optimistic. Any time you can provide research-based information, hopefully that can influence decision making."



DESIGN/BUILD

# Finding *balance*

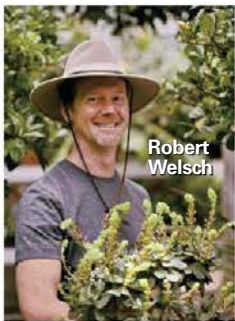
Instituting a few changes improved business—and quality of life—for one Green Industry owner.

By MARISA PALMIERI



In 2010, Robert Welsch was “dog tired and chasing every lead.” The year before, his landscape design/build firm, Westover Landscape Design in Tarrytown, N.Y., had lost money for the first time since opening its doors in 2004. Welsch felt like he was spinning his wheels and knew he needed to make some changes.

The first step was clarifying Westover’s position in its (high-end) market. The company, which declined to disclose its annual revenue, has a 98 percent residential client base just outside of New York City. Typical projects are \$25,000 and up. Welsch, with the help of Green Industry consultant Jeffrey Scott, was able to institute some changes that drastically improved his company’s net profit and average sale size, while decreasing the owner’s stress level and time spent on the business. Finding that balance was enlightening for Welsch, a former publishing executive for whom landscaping is a second career.



Robert Welsch

A few tweaks, including the ones detailed below, helped Westover and Welsch find balance and boost business.

**1 Prequalifying leads.** Before, Welsch was working about 80 hours a week during the season (April to June), and was meeting, in person, with most prospects, “chasing anything and everything.” Now, his business partner prequalifies all leads over the phone, explaining the company’s process and walking them through a questionnaire. That checklist includes questions covering budget and scope, whether the prospect ever has worked with a designer before and his or her address. “We look it up right away on [Zillow.com](http://Zillow.com) to determine the neighborhood and size of the property,” he says. “If they just want a few shrubs moved, we’re not the right firm for them,” he says, explaining the company now refers those who aren’t a good fit elsewhere. “I don’t want to waste their time or my time, either.”

**2 Setting parameters on prospect meetings.** “Now we only do new client meetings on Tuesday, Thursday and Saturday, and never more than three in a day,” Welsch says. “When those

slots are full, I don’t care who the client is, we’re putting them off.” The company now knows it can process only nine follow-ups and proposals per week with its current infrastructure, so setting a limit and choosing only prospects who seem like the right fit has helped eliminate chaos. “Before, I was doing meetings all week—probably 15 a week. I was doing proposals late at night and at 6 a.m. It was unsustainable,” he says.

**3 Changing the subcontracting process.** Westover used to handle masonry estimates and billing, even though it subcontracted out the work. “It was a tremendous amount of back and forth,” Welsch says. “Now, we’re agnostic. We have a variety of masons we work with, and we bring them on and introduce them to clients and we cut ourselves out as the middle man.” Doing so has freed up a lot of time for Welsch. “We have high standards in the quality of work we do and our clients love our subs,” he says. “If anyone doesn’t give Westover quality, they’re out.”

**4 Adding bench strength.** Previously, Welsch was the only one doing estimates. Since reorganizing, he’s added two landscape designers who also serve as project managers. They join him on sales calls, and after the fact they own the projects through their life cycles.

**5 Adding recurring revenue.** Westover used to be 100 percent design/build; today 5 percent of the firm’s business comes from a fine gardening service it created over the last two years. Adding this division was a way for the company to bring in a new revenue stream, take care of its current clients’ needs and nurture relationships with them that may lead to referrals.

Of all the changes, Welsch says not chasing every lead was the most difficult thing to get used to. “As a small business owner, you get very hungry and you always think it’s going to dry up,” he says. But today Welsch works about 60 hours a week during the season—a 25 percent drop from before. That’s not bad for a company that’s improved net profit 100 percent and increased its average sales size by 45 percent over the last two years.



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MAINTENANCE

Free food

Educating clients about the benefits of leaving lawn clippings is an obstacle.

By STEVE THOMAS

**M**ike Maddrell, owner of Echelon Landscape Maintenance, Dublin, Ohio, knows the favorable attributes and science behind allowing leaves and clippings to decompose naturally on lawns. Maddrell studied turf management at The Ohio State University Agricultural Technical Institute, Wooster, Ohio.

But he also knows his customers. "I've tried in the past to explain the benefits of leaving some residue on the lawn, but most people I've taken care of prefer clippings and leaves be removed completely," he says. "I prefer to not bag clippings, as they're good free food for the lawn."

Echelon employees typically cut once and leave the clippings, double mulching only when lawns are unusually long, due to springtime growing conditions. Clumps or clippings are then bagged or crews use a blower to disperse the excess residue.

Kyle Cooper, CEO of Property Masters in Marietta, Ga., understands that some customers always will prefer having their clippings removed. "We currently mulch the majority of our properties, unless customers request them to be bagged," he says. "When bagging, we calculate that cost and figure the charges by square feet and bill accordingly."

After collection, grass clippings are taken to Property Masters' facilities to begin the composting cycle, along with hedge

PHOTO: ISTOCK INTERNATIONAL INC.

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**PVB LOCK BOX**

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trimmings, leaves and other debris. The materials are then taken by Dumpster-load to composting sites, where they're recycled into mulch and topsoil.

Because "grasscycling" (allowing clippings to decompose on site) is the most efficient and least expensive method of handling clippings, educating customers is the real challenge, says Andrew Gembecki, co-founder of Natural Greenscapes Inc., Yorktown Heights, N.Y.

"We're starting to find customers trending to a more natural approach," he says. "We do a lot more mulching on properties and try to convert the non-believers," he says.

When properties are not mulched, Natural Greenscapes' employees blow yard waste into a pile and vacuum clippings.

"At that point our costs go up," he says. "Dumping fees, the costs of operating additional equipment and added labor costs all contribute to higher maintenance pricing, which is passed on to the client."

It's difficult for Gembecki to determine the added expense involved in picking up clippings and leaves, as opposed to mulching the clippings, because there are so many variables.

"Rates of grass growth in May are quite a bit different than October," he says. "Then again, there's a lot more debris and leaves in October than in May. And tipping fees have been rising steadily over the last several years because of lack

of space in landfills."

An informal survey finds a wide divergence in tipping fees across the country, from \$6 per ton in Dublin, Ohio, to \$42 per ton in Red Bluff, Calif.

"We've been offering the mulching as an option for about three years now and our clients love it," says Gembecki. "Not only is it more cost effective for our customers, but they feel like they're giving back by not sending their clippings and yard waste to some dump."

Mulching clippings and debris makes less work for crews, too. It also enables workers to complete their tasks efficiently.

Mulching mowers are designed to cut the grass blades several times by suspending the clippings above the bottom of the deck and allowing the grass to be sliced into very small particles.

The cutting feature allows for having less visible clippings and faster decomposition from shredding.

"In the fall, when leaves and clippings are heavy, I double mulch before I vacuum them," says Maddrell. "It reduces them substantially, and I can fit much more onto my truck. It also composts much faster, and I can then use it as a soil amendment the following season to till in beds."

---

*Thomas is a Columbus, Ohio-based freelance writer.*



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LAWN/TREE CARE

# The grass master

Ohio's Applicator of the Year proves there's more to quality lawn care than fertilizer.

By BETH GERACI

**M**att Tyler takes out the trash. He rakes the leaves, mows the lawn, even brings in the groceries.

No, that's not life at home. Those are some of the extra steps Tyler takes for his lawn care customers on the job. And they're just a few reasons why the Ohio Lawn Care Association (OLCA) named him its 2012 Applicator of the Year.

The award is designated for a lawn care applicator who demonstrates professionalism on the job and leadership at his or her company, and there's no doubt Tyler embodies both of those things, says Matt Ellis, Tyler's boss at Grass Master Inc., who nominated Tyler for the award.

"Once he started working for the company, he raised the bar for everybody else," Ellis says. "He's humble. He demonstrates a level of professionalism that we consider old school now." For example, Ellis says, Tyler watches out for his older customers, knows his clients' dogs and even spent an hour repairing a client's lawn mower.

"I've blown out their garages for them, just little things like that," Tyler says of his old-school style. Why? "I don't know. If they need help, they need help."

Tyler, 49, has worked as a lawn care professional for 24 years, 10 of them at Grass Master, based in Canal Fulton, Ohio. He's both honored and humbled by his Applicator of the Year award. "It's

really, really appreciated," he says. "It's nice to be recognized as an individual who cares and works hard."

## THE VOTES ARE IN

Applicator of the Year nominations are voted on by a nine-person board consisting of chemical manufacturers, distributors and lawn care companies from around Ohio, including Ellis—who serves as the board's vice president.

At first, board members could not nominate their own employees for the award, but that has since changed. "We thought, 'We've got these fantastic nominees and it's really not fair that they wouldn't be considered,'" Ellis says.

Nominations pour in from any of 300 Ohio Lawn Care Association members statewide. The award also is advertised through the Ohio Turf Foundation and at John Deere Landscapes locations around the state so that non-members can nominate candidates.

Tyler is the fourth recipient of the award—a plaque in the shape of Ohio.

Through his professionalism, honesty and willingness to do more than his job requires, Tyler has acquired

quite a fan base on his route. Unfortunately for some of those fans, Grass Master recently changed up its routes to increase its density.

To some of Tyler's customers, it felt like a cruel joke. Says Ellis: "I told one customer, 'Tyler's not going to be your guy anymore. We're changing the routes.' And the customer said, 'No way!'"

## IN-HOUSE IMPACT

Tyler has made an impression not only in the field, but also at the office.

"He's great. He is a pleasure to work with," says Grass Master office manager Carolyn Swinehart. "He's very cooperative. If you ask him to do something, he will do it."

Swinehart is so impressed by Tyler's work ethic that she was eager to share a complimentary letter from one of his customers. "We have been customers of Grass Master for 14 years," the letter stated. "The great looks of our lawn are mainly due to your products and your service technician Matt Tyler."

Tyler takes such praise in stride, saying he's just an ordinary guy who listens to his customers and uses common sense.

"I mean, yeah, I work long hours some days and it's a little much sometimes," he says. "But if you pace yourself it's all right. It's satisfying. It's gratifying. It makes it all worthwhile." **LM**

*"I've blown out customers' garages for them, just little things like that. I don't know. If they need help, they need help."* —Matt Tyler



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# The problem with negotiating

**Q** We work in a very competitive market and quite often our clients want to negotiate the price when we present the proposal. We don't want to artificially inflate the prices to give us some wiggle room, but we also don't want to lose money. What's the best way to handle this?

—Edward Thompson, Sunrise Landscape, Milton, Ontario

**A** The short answer is a quote from the movie "The Fugitive." It's a hostage situation and Tommy Lee Jones (as Deputy Marshal Samuel Gerard) simply says, "I don't negotiate." Now clearly I cannot say it as cool as he did, but the message is very clear.

As we all know, the reason some clients want to negotiate is to lower the price and get something for nothing. Let's be honest; most of us try to do the same thing with our own vendors.

Let's walk through the typical scenario. You present your proposal to the clients, including everything they requested at a number you feel is reasonable. They're happy you included everything on their wish list; unfortunately, they aren't as happy with the price. So what do they do? They ask if you can do it for less. You want the work, so your first reaction is to say "OK." It seems innocent enough. Well I can tell you it's not. The biggest problem with opening the door to negotiations is as soon as you do, everything from that moment on is going to be a negotiation.

What happens when you agree to negotiate? The first thing you do is lower the price so you can get the work. As soon as you agree to the new adjusted price, you get the follow up question, "That includes sales tax, right?" You agree to the price including sales tax because it's a decent job and it's only a few more bucks out of your pocket. If you're like most contractors you tell yourself you'll be able to make the money back on change orders.

However, before your clients sign the proposal they hit you up with a few "you know whats." "You know what, can we make it 20 flats of annuals

instead of 15 flats?" "You know what, can we use 2-gallon perennials instead of 1-gallon?" "You know what, can we just include those couple of step stones?" Each item isn't such a big deal by itself, but before you know it you've just given away some hefty profits and you haven't even started the job.

Once the job begins you're now entering phase two of the negotiating process. This is where it's open season on the "would you minds" and "while you're heres." You know exactly what I'm talking about. As you're doing the installation, the homeowner or property manager seems to always come outside asking you or your crew to do favors. The client knows you're a pushover so he's going to take advantage of you every step of the way. When you do try to submit change orders he either dismisses them as being invalid or negotiates them down to half of what you billed them for.

You know what else? It doesn't stop there. What do you think is going to happen when you finish the project and submit your final bill? You got it—negotiations. Does this sound familiar? "You guys did a great job and we want to cut you a check for the balance, but since we went over budget we need you to adjust that number down a bit. Also, we want you to extend the plant warranty to two years instead of one and include an IPM program for the first year until the plants had a full growing season."

At this point you'll agree to just about anything because you need the payment to make payroll and have a big stack of payables. Since all of the profit has been negotiated out of the project you tell yourself that you did a great job and that's payment enough. You're satisfied you have another customer who will recommend you for future work and you'll definitely make money on the next one.

What's the best way to deal with a client who wants to negotiate? Give them a fair price and do your best Tommy Lee Jones. Simply say, "I don't negotiate."

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To submit a question for Profiting From Design, please contact Shilan at jshilan@gmail.com.





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A new division allowed Sonoran Gardens to add maintenance in the turf-free desert.

## Custom growth

A Tucson-based landscape company finds a unique niche in the maintenance market.



**G**IVEN ARIZONA'S DESERT landscape, xeriscaping is often a necessity. As a result, many landscape companies here don't have a strong focus on traditional landscape maintenance. Instead, they drive much of their revenue from design/build projects with hardscaping. Still, when clients kept asking Sonoran Gardens in Tucson to tackle some of their maintenance work, the company decided to expand into the arena in a unique way—with a Custom Care division that would address all their clients' needs.

"This is a concept that's not so original in other parts of the country but out here it really fills a gap that's missing," says Sonoran President Chris Niccum. "Customers were calling us with their maintenance needs and it was obvious they wanted something that was full service. So we tried to address that with a Custom Care program in which the client receives a package that includes everything needed to keep their landscape top notch."

Since there aren't any lawns to mow, landscape maintenance might include general cleanup, plant care, insect and weed control, pruning, replacing outdoor lighting bulbs, adjustments to irrigation controllers and minor irrigation system repairs.

"Each landscape out here is really different, so it truly is a custom package," says Niccum. "We figure out exactly what each property needs to look its best and then include all of that in a monthly service fee."

Last August, Sonoran Gardens acquired the Contained Gardner, a company specializing in container gardens for residential and commercial clientele. Clients can now choose to add a container garden service, which has been a great revenue driver for the company. It has a biweekly maintenance feature (running approximately \$100 per month for a typical pot), during which a technician fertilizes, deadheads, checks for insects and performs other routine container garden maintenance.

In addition, twice a year the pots are completely emptied and replanted. Niccum says the service has been a nice fit with the core design/build component of his business. Clients may choose to do one or more pot installations during construction, which can run anywhere from \$500 to \$800 per installation.

When Custom Care was first launched, Niccum was able to use two existing employees to run the division—a foreman with the ability to handle maintenance work and a designer who had a great eye for property layouts. As the division has grown, Sonoran has hired a full-time manager and the staff has grown to eight.

Because he grew Custom Care slowly, Niccum says he didn't need much capital outlay. The division initially used equipment and staff the company already had and only added more as the need—and the revenue—drove it.

Niccum says communication is a huge part of what makes the division so successful. Clients always get a heads up before staff members visit the property and are asked if there's anything special they should pay attention to.

"When we're done, the client is sent a complete checklist of everything we did, whether it was fixing a leak, replacing a light bulb or replacing a plant—everything is itemized," Niccum says.

Also included in the package is a yearly landscape evaluation where a designer gives the client ideas for potential upgrades to plantings, lighting and more, he says. "That often ends up generating some new projects for us."

As Niccum looks to the future, he sees the division expanding even further. Pool maintenance and even handyman services are strong possibilities.

"Clients like the idea of having all their needs handled by one company that they already have a relationship with and that they trust."

Casey Payton is a freelance writer with seven years of experience writing about the landscape industry.

### » SERVICE SNAPSHOT

#### WHY CUSTOM CARE?

"Customers wanted a company with horticultural experience to handle some of the maintenance needs they were hiring other maintenance people to do, and they wanted a full-service experience," says Chris Niccum, president of Sonoran Gardens.

**TARGET CLIENT?** The program targets high-end customers who aren't solely price driven, he says. "It's people who are willing to pay to get better service and better quality."

**KEY TO SUCCESS?** A focus on good communication has really driven the success of this service, says Niccum. "People like the idea of it being custom-designed for them and that everything is included in one single package."



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## IRRIGATION CONTROLLERS & ACCESSORIES



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The 14-in.-by-17-in.-by-10-in. CLOCKBOX unit fits most outdoor irrigation controllers to protect them from being stolen or tampered with. It features a removable front cover for access. Its locking mechanism consists of two security 0.5-in. hex-pin locking bolts and includes two unlocking bits—one

for the owner and one for the irrigation or maintenance technician.

**PVB Lock Box** // [PVBLockBox.com](http://PVBLockBox.com)

### ESP-Me

The new ESP-Me controller builds upon the features of its predecessor, the ESP Modular. Contractors can install the optional three- or six-station modules and expand the ESP-Me from its standard four stations all the way up to 22 stations, eliminating the need to stock multiple controllers or teach crew members how to install and program them. Other features include delay watering, seasonal adjust by program and the total run time calculator.

**Rain Bird** // [ESPMeNews.rainbird.com](http://ESPMeNews.rainbird.com)



### Roam XL

The Roam XL is a long-distance remote designed to let professionals communicate with multiple controllers from up to two miles away. Its signal is strong enough to go through buildings and still communicate with a controller more than a half-mile away. It features a simple user interface with 128 different programmable addresses.

**Hunter Industries** // [HunterIndustries.com/roamxl](http://HunterIndustries.com/roamxl)



### Sapien

A two-wire controller with 63 stations, Sapien now features a new line of customized enclosures that protect the system from weather elements, vandalism and pests. The enclosures are available in heavy-duty plastic or stainless steel as wall mounts or pedestal-style. No special wiring or field grounding is required with Underhill's 2Wire products.

**Underhill International** // [Underhill.us](http://Underhill.us)

### XCI Cloud

The latest version of the XCI Cloud, which allows users to manage an unlimited number of irrigation sites and controllers online, features odd-even water scheduling, full integration with Blackberry mobile devices (alongside its existing iPhone functionality) and GPS site and controller location information. Cyber-Rain central irrigation control systems automatically adjust watering schedules based on local weather information, and there is no monthly fee for weather feeds.

**Cyber-Rain** // [Cyber-Rain.com](http://Cyber-Rain.com)





## MOWERS

### Model 226V-48

The Model 226V-48 offers a 48-in. cutting deck along with the 52- and 61-in. deck options for Model 226V. Its individual pump-and-wheel motor drive is design matched for precision control, while an extra-deep 48-in. cutting deck offers side discharge, mulching and vacuum capabilities. Other features include True ZeroTurn maneuverability, a 12-gal. fuel tank and smooth handling.

**Grasshopper** // [GrasshopperMower.com/226V](http://GrasshopperMower.com/226V)



### Lazer Z X-Series

Exmark has introduced RED technology to its Lazer Z X-Series with Kohler electronic fuel injection power. It uses an electronic governor and operator-defined performance modes and is designed to reduce fuel consumption compared to carbureted models. The Exmark custom seat is a standard feature. The series is available with a 60- or 72-in. full-floating cutting deck.

**Exmark** // [Exmark.com](http://Exmark.com)



### QuikTrak

The redesigned John Deere QuikTrak stand-on commercial mower offers a short design and is very light, making it highly maneuverable around obstacles and contours in the turf. The QuikTrak is available in the B Series and R Series. Both feature run-flat front tires and sealed front caster bearings. The B Series features a 7-gauge, fabricated 52-in. fixed deck. The R Series is available with 48-, 52-, or 61-in. 7-gauge fabricated floating decks and also offers a quick height-of-cut adjustment and cast iron front forks.

**John Deere** // [JohnDeere.com/MowPro](http://JohnDeere.com/MowPro)

### TurfMaster

The 30-in. deck on the new, wide-area Toro TurfMaster walk-behind mower features a precisely timed, twin-blade cutting system and a three-in-one design for mulching, bagging or side-discharge. Powered by a Kawasaki FJ180V gas engine with a spin-on oil filter, it has a rear-wheel drive transmission with variable ground speeds up to 4.1 mph.

**Toro** // [Toro.com/TurfMaster](http://Toro.com/TurfMaster)



### Raptor

Starting at less than \$3,000, the all-new zero-turn Raptor is powered by a Kawasaki engine and is built with a fabricated steel deck. Features include Hustler's patented SmoothTrak Steering and its Automated Park Brake System. The Raptor is backed by a three-year warranty.

**Hustler Turf Equipment** // [HustlerTurf.com](http://HustlerTurf.com)





## Mid-mount ZTO mower

Wright's new mid-mount Zero Technology Optimized (ZTO) mower offers deck widths of 48, 52 and 61 in. A transmission interlock is built into the controls, eliminating the need for a separate parking brake. Featuring a 15-gal. fuel tank, the ZTO's cutting speed is 10.5 mph with either the standard 31-hp Kawasaki FX or optional Briggs & Stratton Commercial Turf (Cyclonic) engine.

**Wright Commercial Products** // [WrightMfg.com](http://WrightMfg.com)



## Pro-Stance series

The new Pro-Stance series features integrated transmissions and a foot pedal deck lift. The integrated Hydro-Gear transmissions provide a low center of gravity to handle slopes or uneven terrain. Speeds reach up to 9 mph. Another feature is the dial height-of-cut adjustment, which allows the operator to change the deck height at the control panel without stepping off the machine.

**Gravely** // [Gravely.com](http://Gravely.com)



## TREE CARE PRODUCTS

### CS-355T

The new CS-355T chain saw weighs 8 lbs. and features a 35.8 cc commercial-grade two-stroke engine. It offers a palm rest that provides control, supporting the operator's hand and preventing the hand from sliding. A G-Force Engine Air Pre-Cleaner provides a clean air supply to the engine by pulling dust and chips from the air box.

**ECHO** // [ECHO-USA.com](http://ECHO-USA.com)



### Carbide Cutter G3

Loftness' Carbide Cutter G3 mulching head attachment for skid-steers is available with 51-, 61- and 71-in. cutting widths. The cutter features a two-stage cutting chamber with staggered counter teeth and a shear bar. This combination of features results in small particle sizes, while eliminating jamming and wrapping issues.

**Loftness** // [VM-Logix.com](http://VM-Logix.com)



### TREE-age and PHOSPHO-jet

TREE-age insecticide and PHOSPHO-jet fungicide are now labeled for use in California. TREE-age provides up to two years of control for insects like emerald ash borer and mountain pine beetle. PHOSPHO-jet, a systemic fungicide, helps suppress various plant diseases like sudden oak death and anthracnose. It inhibits fungal cells while eliciting a plant health response from the tree.

**Arborjet** // [Arborjet.com](http://Arborjet.com)



### US500 and US1000

TurfEx's line of skid-mounted spot sprayers are designed to mount into the bed of any utility vehicle or pickup. Available with a 50-gal. (model US500) or a 100-gal. tank (model US1000), the units feature 50-ft. hoses on 100-ft.-capacity manual-rewind hose reels and long spray wands with trigger actuation. An optional trailer kit is available.

**TurfEx** // [TurfExProducts.com](http://TurfExProducts.com)



### E-750 electric wheelbarrow

The Power Pusher E-750 offers a motorized wheelbarrow alternative that operates quietly and is able to move as much as 750 lbs. at up to 3 mph. Its power dump feature enables operators to eject material without lifting the device. It has a bed capacity of 9 cu. ft.

**Power Pusher** // [Electric-Dumper.com](http://Electric-Dumper.com)



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3/13	<b>Joe Salemi</b> , Vendor <i>DynaSCAPE</i>	Design Software, Marketing	<b>DynaSCAPE</b>
3/20	<b>Jeff Korhan</b> , Consultant/Author <i>True Nature Inc.</i>	Social Media, Marketing	<b>DynaSCAPE</b>
3/27	<b>Rich Arlington</b> , Consultant <i>Rich Arlington &amp; Associates</i>	Business, Team Building	<b>DynaSCAPE</b>
4/3	<b>Jerry McKay</b> , Contractor <i>McKay Landscape Lighting</i>	Landscape Lighting Design, Sales	Sponsorship Available
4/10	<b>Mike Rorie</b> , Vendor <i>GIS Dynamics</i>	Business Growth, Estimating, Software	Sponsorship Available

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## ABOUT THE HOST

Jody Shilan is an award-winning landscape designer with more than 35 years of experience in the green industry. In addition to hosting FD2B Talk Radio and managing FromDesign2Build.com, Shilan is a regular presenter at industry events and writes the "Profiting from Design" column for *Landscape Management* magazine.

Shilan earned his Bachelor of Science in Landscape Architecture (BSLA) from Rutgers Cook College and his Master's Degree in Landscape Architecture (MLA) from the University of Massachusetts.



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# Bob Dobson

*President of Middletown (N.J.) Sprinkler Co.,  
and president of the Irrigation Association*



**Who's your mentor?** Phil DeMarco, who owned an irrigation distributorship in South Jersey. Phil and I have spoken daily for nearly 40 years. As a young contractor, Phil was my "go to" person. He is who I called when I had a question, when I needed to know how to do something. He was responsible for getting me involved in the Irrigation Association (IA). He was serving on the IA board of directors and suggested my name for appointment to the planning council. That was nearly 30 years ago.

**What are the irrigation industry's biggest obstacles?** One of our biggest challenges is all the regulations, codes and standards. Many of these seem to villainize turf, and, in doing so, irrigation. They do not recognize the benefits of well-maintained turfgrass; that turf reduces runoff and erosion, enhances ground water recharge, moderates air temperatures and sequesters atmospheric carbon, not to mention turfgrass beautifies and enhances the landscape. Efficient irrigation is an essential element necessary to maintaining healthy turf. The irrigation industry, the IA, wants a seat at the table to help develop these standards and to ensure they are developed based on sound science.

**You've been involved in the irrigation industry for 45 years. What's changed the most for the better over the years?** I started Middletown Sprinkler Co. with a partner in 1968. Without a doubt the product has improved dramatically. It's more reliable, flexible and, most importantly, it improves the uniformity of the irrigation we apply so we use less water.

**Has anything changed for the worse?** I think the part that's most challenging is the competitiveness of the market. There were maybe 10 irrigation contractors in the state of New Jersey in late 1960s. Now there are well over a thousand. The competitiveness is a challenge.

**What excites you about being president of the IA?** My opportunity to work with many of the other Green Industry associations. We may represent different segments of the industry, but we share mutual challenges and opportunities. I've met the leadership of many of the associations and look forward to collaborative efforts for the benefit of the industry. I am also excited about our upcoming irrigation show in November. We're going to a new venue, Austin, Texas. I am really looking forward to the show, to working with the state and local Texas associations in promoting and delivering a great show. My youngest daughter, Colleen, tells me Austin rocks.



## OFF THE CLOCK

### WHO MAKES UP YOUR FAMILY?

My wife of 39 years, Judy, and my three children, Kelly, Colleen and Robert, who is vice president of Middletown Sprinkler Co., and my two grandsons, Henry and Jack.

### WHAT DO YOU DO TO RELAX?

Fly fish when I can.

### CAT PERSON OR DOG PERSON?

Dog person. We have Molly, a 1 1/2-year-old chocolate lab.

### WHEN DID YOU FIRST GET INVOLVED WITH THE IA?

My first experience with IA was through taking a regional education session, probably in the mid-1970s. It piqued my interest and a short time later I became a member. I became a certified irrigation designer and obtained all three landscape designer certifications. In the 1980s I was appointed to the planning council, next I was asked to join the certification board where I served for six years and was chairman for a year. It was a phenomenal experience, likewise with the IA board of directors and executive committee. I have met, got to know and learned from some amazing people.





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