

MARKET WATCH

IRRIGATION

Harvesting savings

A California company focuses on “smart” landscaping and irrigation to reduce clients’ water use. *By JONATHAN KATZ*

Steven Schinhofen speaks with the business acumen of a Silicon Valley entrepreneur. His company, Harvest Landscape Enterprises, is actually located about 400 miles down the coast in Anaheim, Calif., and the business is a far cry from the high-tech world of microprocessors.

Still, the 34-year-old business-school graduate says his maintenance and design firm is beating traditional “mow-and-blow” competitors by applying a science-based approach to landscaping. This includes a focus on water conservation through sustainable landscape practices.

It’s much more than a feel-good marketing ploy. The president of Harvest says sustainability is key to profitability. “It’s not just the right thing to do, but it’s also the smart thing,” Schinhofen says. “By being more efficient with the water, we actually haul less green waste and make more money.”

The “green waste” typically occurs when companies overwater and overfertilize their properties, which eventually require more maintenance and labor, he says. Harvest offers customers a program called SmartScape that focuses on creating a landscape requiring less water and thrives in the Southern California climate.

BREAKING WITH TRADITION

Schinhofen has landscaping in his blood. His grandfather started a landscape company in 1963, and 20 years later his father opened his own landscaping business. Schinhofen began working summers for his father after graduating high school in 1997. By 2003, he decided to add a third landscaping business to the family portfolio. He established Harvest using the business knowledge he gained in college and the real-world experience he achieved working for his father. But he didn’t want

to do things the old-fashioned way.

Early on, a local water district asked Harvest to test a smart irrigation controller on one of the company’s properties. Schinhofen liked how the controller worked, so he contacted the manufacturer to provide training on the system. He also hired a bilingual irrigation expert to educate his staff on how to be more resource efficient.

He noticed drought conditions in California created customer demand for these controllers and sustainable landscapes as water prices increased. Property owners were installing their own smart controllers, but many landscape contractors weren’t willing to help their customers reduce water consumption. That’s where Harvest stepped in.

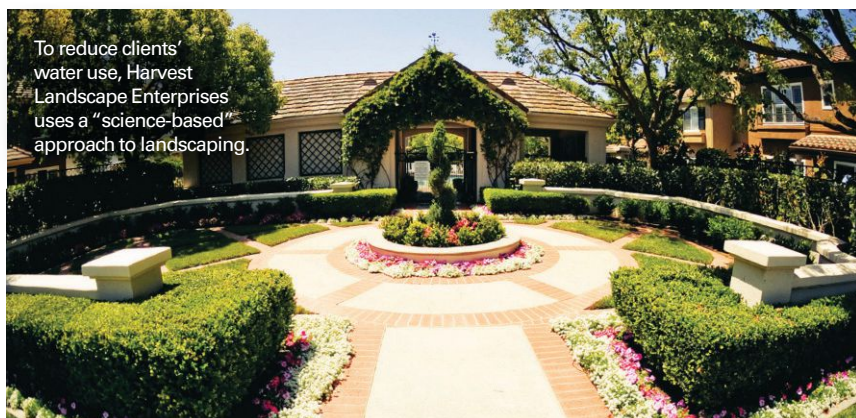
The company also became involved with a nonprofit environmental group called Orange County Coastkeeper, which focuses on protecting the region’s waterways. Harvest helped establish Coastkeeper’s sustainable demonstration garden, which enhanced the company’s reputation as an expert in sustainable landscapes.

WATER-SAVING CASE STUDY

Managing irrigation volume is only part of the water-conservation equation. Landscape design plays a significant role as well. While many companies and customers may suggest replacing shrubs with native plants as a way to reduce water usage, Schinhofen says that alone is typically not effective. All



Steven Schinhofen



To reduce clients’ water use, Harvest Landscape Enterprises uses a “science-based” approach to landscaping.

native plants aren't visually appealing and the return on investment can take up to 20 years. As an additional measure he advocates replacing turf, where appropriate.

An example of where turf reduction made sense is a beach community in Dana Point, Calif., called Niguel Shores of Dana Point. It had been using the same landscape contractor for the past 35 years to maintain the 95-acre property. When Schinhofen arrived he noticed the property was "grossly overwatered." To fix this problem and others like it, Harvest begins with an assessment process that considers the square footage of the landscape along with other factors, such as the percentage of turf, flower beds, slope and evapotranspiration rates. He puts those variables into a formula to determine how much water the property is wasting. The company then maps the irrigation system to identify flaws.

Harvest replaced more than 100,000 square feet of turf at Niguel Shores with

drought-tolerant shrubs and replaced a irrigation systems with drip irrigation to save water and prevent runoff. The community expects to save \$17,000 a year with the improvements. Schinhofen helped the community earn rebates from the local water department to subsidize the project. The project should pay for itself within seven years, Schinhofen adds.

"We are already using less water, making faster progress on the implementation of the master landscape project and at a sharply reduced cost versus initial projections, says Steve Stewart, a Niguel Shores Community Association board member. "Also, we are seeing higher homeowner satisfaction with the current condition of our landscape."

For Harvest, the payoff has been an increasing share of the local landscape market. Schinhofen eventually purchased both his father's company and the business his grandfather founded. Harvest now



has five branches throughout Southern California and more than 400 employees. The focus on sustainability also has made the business more resilient.

"The peak of us doing all this conservation work was also when the market crashed, which impacted our profits, but we probably weren't impacted as much as our competitors and were able to survive the economic downturn," Schinhofen says.

Katz is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.

PHOTO: HARVEST LANDSCAPE ENTERPRISES

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MAINTENANCE

History in the making

Providence Landscape gets the chance to redesign and maintain a Proven Winners Signature Garden at 100-year-old The Duke Mansion.

By MARISA PALMIERI

The decision nearly 20 years ago to provide landscape maintenance at cost for a high-profile but financially struggling property with historical significance has turned into a unique opportunity for Jim Lawrence, owner of Providence Landscape in Charlotte, N.C.

Today the \$8 million landscape maintenance and design/build company is a partner in the effort to redesign the gardens at The Duke Mansion in celebration of its 100th anniversary in 2015.

“As a landscaper, to be a part of a project like this, it’s once in a lifetime,” Lawrence says. “If you can’t get excited and passionate about something like this, you shouldn’t be in the business.”

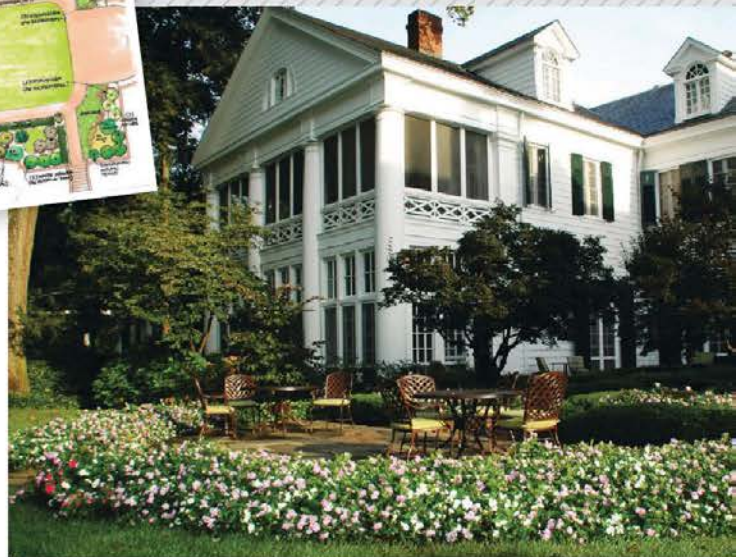
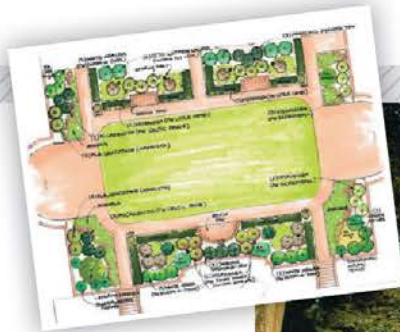
The relationship between Lawrence and the mansion started in the mid-1990s. At the time he was with the Charlotte branch of Atlanta-based HighGrove Partners. (Lawrence purchased the branch in 2006, forming Providence.) The Duke Mansion, which operates as a nonprofit event and meeting venue with 20 guest rooms, was going through some financial troubles. It had a full-time horticulturist on staff but was looking to cut costs. Lawrence’s company, offering its services at cost, was able to improve the look of the property and do it less expensively than the Duke was paying a full-time staff member.

“We do it at cost for them because it’s Charlotte’s most historic property,” Lawrence says. “We can help preserve it and at the same time it helps us sell more work because it’s a very prominent, high-profile property and we can show that on our resume. It works out really well for both of us.”

Currently, Providence sends a three- or four-man crew to the mansion twice a week. For the centennial garden project the company will be on site even more, providing project management, design, installation and eventually maintenance on the new gardens. The Duke Mansion aims to raise \$5 million, about \$800,000 of which will go to the gardens. The rest will go to an endowment to maintain the mansion for years ahead, Lawrence says.

» WEB EXTRA

To learn more about the Signature Garden program and why The Duke Mansion gardens were a good fit, visit the Web Extras section on [Landscape Management.net](http://LandscapeManagement.net).



‘SIGNATURE’ DESIGN

As the project is still in the fundraising stage, only one “baby step” is complete, Lawrence says. Two small gardens were completed in time for the campaign’s kick-off last spring to give patrons and donors a taste of what’s to come. Many of the details are still in the works but one vital component has been solidified: The Duke Mansion will be home to a Proven Winners Signature Garden—it’s just one of three in the U.S. The others are the Hotel Iroquois on Michigan’s Mackinac Island and Grand Tradition Estate and Gardens in Southern California.

After Lawrence heard about plant brand Proven Winners’ Signature Garden program from his local grower, King’s Greenhouse in Matthews, N.C., he, the folks at the Duke and Proven Winners began a months’ long “courtship” to ensure it was a good fit for all parties, he says. The property was officially accepted as a Signature Garden last year.

As for specifics of the design, it’s still in the early stages, but it will include a path to welcome visitors to tour the gardens. Currently, the grounds of the mansion are open to the public, but the building’s stateliness is intimidating. “You feel like maybe you shouldn’t go behind the gate,” Lawrence says. “These gardens are going to invite people to take advantage of this property.”

A Southern aesthetic also is expected, including roses, camellias and magnolias. “It will include Proven Winners’ latest and greatest signature and heirloom plants throughout,” Lawrence says. “The challenge is to preserve the Southern architectural heritage and the historical value of the property.”

Lawrence is also quick to point out even though the Duke is a century-old property, its landscape will feature new technology, including a brand new “smart” irrigation system and LED landscape lighting.

“It’s those kinds of things, coupled with the latest and greatest-engineered plants, that are going to be the one of the neat things about this,” he says. “Through the collaboration we’re going to be able to put out an incredible garden for Charlotte, and I really think it will be known throughout the U.S.”

Providing services for The Duke Mansion at cost is a win-win, Jim Lawrence says.

LAWN/TREE CARE

35-mph grass

How one landscape company uses ecolawns as part of its mix. *By SARAH PFLEDDERER*

Envision a lawn that needs to be mowed only a couple times a year. Your customers are likely ecstatic about the reduction of landscaping costs and so much so you make up the slump in revenue from new work, per their referrals.

Sound too good to be true? It is.

But this was the overrated notion for ecological lawns, aka ecolawns, when they came about 20 years ago as the brainchild of Tom Cook, an associate professor of horticulture at Oregon State University.

The majority clover-covered turfgrass that required nearly nil maintenance was to be a sustainable substitute for traditional lawns recalls Bob Grover, president of

Pacific Landscape Management in Hillsboro, Ore. But after going untouched for more than a month, the lawns would look like an ugly field once mowed.

Due to sustainability interests from commercial clients, Pacific Landscape Management bounced back the ecolawn concept five years ago.

Since then it has installed and maintained about a dozen ecolawns, which it markets as EcoLawns, and has seen a threefold advantage to them versus traditional turf:

- › 50 percent less mowing.
- › 100 percent less fertilization.
- › 30 percent less irrigation.

SUITABLE SETTINGS

Ecolawns are not “front-door grass,” Grover says. In fact, they’re most suitable in spaces that receive few visitors passing close by.

A more fitting description, he says, is “35-mph grass.” “It’s green and you glance at it as you’re driving by. But if you walk on it, it may not look as great every day as a fine-cut lawn,” Grover says. “If you’re using it at the right place and you give it enough maintenance, we’ve had some good success.”

Grover says an ecolawn fares best in locations with little foot traffic because passersby can’t tell from afar the turf is mostly comprised of clover. Moreover, clover attracts bees when it blooms, making ecolawns a risky substitute for a backyard, school or athletic field where people could get stung.



Bob Grover, president of Pacific Landscape Management

“It’s green and you glance at it as you’re driving by.”

—Bob Grover

This type of turf, though, is able to grow in any area traditional lawns grow, Grover says.

“I think it would be possible to grow this in all regions of the country,” he says. “If you really want to be ecological, it’d be a great option.”

THE LOGISTICS

Ecolawns are comprised of a dwarf grass, herbaceous plant and clover seed mixture. Pacific Landscape Management purchases its mixture from Oregon suppliers Hobbs & Hopkins, Sunmark Seeds and Nichols Garden Nursery.

Clover is the key ingredient to the lawn’s sustainability, given it is drought tolerant—although not 100 percent—and it nitrifies the soil, thus naturally and fully fertilizing the lawn.

PHOTOS: PACIFIC LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT



Ecolawns are comprised of a dwarf grass, herbaceous plant and clover seed mix. Bob Grover says they're best suited for "drive-by" areas.

As far as controlling broadleaf weeds like dandelions, Pacific Landscape Management occasionally will do spot herbicide treatments, Grover says.

When implementing EcoLawns for customers, the company has grown them from scratch, but more commonly it converts existing lawns by overseeding. It charges about 50 cents per square foot for installations and the turf can take up to a year to be fully established.

Regular mowing, Grover says, is most important in maintaining the lawn. He suggests mowing no more than every other week in a growing season, which cuts maintenance needs for clients by about half.

Grover, who calls ecolawns a "necessary evil piece of landscaping," says it can be difficult for some customers to swallow the idea of willingly letting a weed govern their lawn.

"It's a different thought process and theory," he says. "We don't have people beating our door to say, 'Please convert my lawn.'"

Yet, to an extent, that's OK with him. "It's a great way to help your customer out," he says. "But if I did that on all the lawns I maintain, I would probably cut my revenue by 20 percent."

To strike a balance Grover floats the option of EcoLawns to customers, but doesn't actively market them. The idea,

he says, is to stay ahead of his competition with "cutting-edge" offerings.

"Ecological or otherwise, we really don't want to be left behind because somebody else is offering something we aren't," he says. "If this is something our customers are interested in, we don't want to be left behind."

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Money talks

A Plus Lawn and Landscape grabs attention with a unique marketing ploy. —

By MOLLY BEALIN

In April, residents of select central Kentucky neighborhoods were surprised to find in their driveways Velcro wallets with what appeared to be large sums of money inside.

Each wallet was in fact a promotion from A Plus Lawn and Landscape in Lawrenceburg, Ky., including a business card for owner John Rennels, which appeared to be a Kentucky driver's license. It also included the full-service company's phone number and website. Several different cards for discounts and specials, some of which were written on fake \$100 bills were also in the wallet. The discounts were for maintenance and design/build services. They ranged from a free consultation and design with contract for project construction and a free first mowing with a weekly mowing service contract.

Several months after launching the promotions, Rennels says the company of eight employees plans to do a similar campaign again.

"We're still getting results from the promotion because we are doing year-



long analysis," Rennels says. "Feedback has been 95 percent positive; we've gotten some very good publicity and created some buzz."

The company spent \$11,000 on the campaign and choose to conduct it during April because that's when landscape services are the most in demand, he says.

"We have a two-week window when it first starts to get warm. Since it didn't get warm until May we're going to run it another year. It was a very odd sales season this year," he says.

Many advertising pieces are immediately discarded by the consumer and don't produce high results, he says. Rennels came up with campaign by asking himself the question, "How

could we take this driveway drop ... and make it something that people are going to pick up?"

He was fairly sure people would pick up something that gave the appearance of money. He purchased 10,000 wallets from China and stuffed them with his promotional materials before distributing them to target neighborhoods.

While Rennels is still quantifying the results of the wallet campaign he predicts it will bode well for the company and plans to do another campaign next year with the same concept in the same areas. **LM**

Bealin is a Cleveland-based contributor for Landscape Management.

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