



Glenn Jacobsen, LIC

president, Jacobsen Landscape Design & Construction, Midland Park, N.J.



How'd you get your start? I get asked that all the time. I got in this business just like many others did, cutting lawns in the neighborhood. That evolved into going to college and into the design part of the business. I started my business in 1978 in high school. You can tell by the number of hairs on my head it's been 35 years.

What was your original company name? At first it was Jacobsen Landscaping & Tree Service because my dad had a part-time tree business. It evolved from that and after about 10 years we went to Design & Construction.

You're current president of the Professional Landcare Network's (PLANET) board of directors. When did you first get involved with the association? What about your involvement has helped your business? It was ALCA back in the mid-1990s when I got involved. I went to a Green Industry Conference out in Fort Worth, Texas. I saw the industry as having a national presence and that opened my eyes. I got involved with committee work—membership and a few others. I did that until 2003-2004. Right before the [ALCA/PLCAA] merger I was on the ALCA board, then I was off for a couple years before joining the PLANET board. The No. 1 thing is just seeing other companies and the networking I've had the opportunity to do. You're not operating in a bubble, as you often do.

Any words of wisdom? You can't expand too quickly and overleverage yourself with debt. We've always been fiscally conservative as far as taking loans and we've grown organically versus through acquisitions. There are a lot of people who will lend you money and you can go into debt pretty quickly. We've never done that. I've always been wary of it, probably because of my wife, Melissa. She's CFO here and she's fiscally conservative. In the tough economic times, a lot of the companies that went out of business were overleveraged. We're virtually debt free.

Any advice for working with your spouse? Work with each other's strengths, know each other's weaknesses and separate duties as much as possible. It's the same as having any partner, as far as I'm concerned. With any partnership, you want to separate duties. We've been married 30 years. It's not easy to be in business with your spouse, but we've been blessed with different traits, personalities and skills. In the same respect, it's a blessing because we have the same end goal.

What's the best business decision you've made? Running it like a business, hiring the right people and building the right team. It's been said many times but there's so much truth to it: Hiring is not an exact science. You can do as much research as you want and try to fit people into the right positions. There are definitely some lessons learned, as far as thinking you have the right hire and 'Boy, what was I thinking?' As the company has evolved, hiring is what it's all about.

OFF THE CLOCK

TELL US ABOUT YOUR FAMILY.

Our daughter Rachel, who's 24, is a special education math and science teacher at a charter school in Boston. Our son Christopher, 25, completed his master's at Harvard this past May and works in development at Hamilton College in upstate New York. He is getting married in October.

FAVORITE FOOD? Italian food.

WHAT DO YOU DO TO RELAX?

I enjoy outdoor activities. We have a lake house in New York state. I like sailing, not that I get a chance to do it too much. We're outdoor people.

FAVORITE MUSICIAN?

That's easy. I'm from New Jersey, so it's either Bon Jovi or Springsteen, but Springsteen is the guy. I've been to many of his concerts.

SO WHAT'S THE BEST SPRING-STEEN SONG?

My favorite is "Thunder Road." It has that great ending.



PHOTOS: GLENN JACOBSEN; ISTOCK INTERNATIONAL INC.

