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Landscape Management

SAME TREE, *different branches*

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Brothers Roscoe Klausing (left) of Klausing Group, Lexington, Ky., and Brook Klausing of Brook Landscape, Brooklyn, N.Y.

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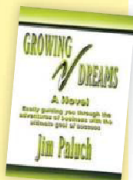
Facebook Feature QUESTION OF THE WEEK

Do you remember the moment you knew you wanted to be a landscape professional?

- » **Ryan Krafve:** 10. Taking care of my elderly neighbors' homes.
- » **Wesley Chiles:** My first business card was at 10 years old!
- » **Gerald Landby:** Not really, I was born a landscape professional.

WEB EXTRAS Visit LandscapeManagement.net > Click on Web Extras

- » Jeff Harkness continues the online advertising conversation, touching on how to market your business via Facebook and LinkedIn (from page 14).
- » Check out how the Klausings brothers' story inspired Jim Paluch's novel *Growing Dreams* (from page 24). Plus, win a copy of the book!
- » We turn to the owner of Morisue Photography for tips on capturing and uploading images online (from page 31).



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FREIGHTLINER



EDITOR'S NOTE

MARISA PALMIERI EDITOR

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

Difference makers

What makes the difference between you and your competitors? You may think you know, and you may have an answer you give to customers and prospects who ask, but do you really know?

Of course, this is a rhetorical question because no one could actually account for all the variances. It was interesting, though, to hear one firm's take on what will separate the weak from the strong in the landscape industry moving forward.

I'm not talking about just any company, I'm referring to ValleyCrest Landscape Cos., the nearly billion-dollar, Calabasas, Calif.-based national firm. CEO Roger Zino and Senior Vice President Dave Hanson gave a talk, "Raising the Bar—The Importance of Competing on Service & Quality," at the Professional Landcare Network's Great Escape event late last month in Anaheim, Calif.

A survival-of-the-fittest element—which was evident in full force during the 2007 to 2009 recession—has continued post-downturn and will persist, Hanson predicted. "The weak will get weaker," he said. "Bad decision-making compounds itself over time."

So, what will make the difference? Hanson and Zino focused on four factors.

Excellent relationships. "Loyalty, as we know, is tough to win and easy to lose," Hanson said. "Those who stay close to their customers will win." How? Professionals who are tied in with their clients may get a "last look" at a bid, for example, or a phone call

rather than a cancellation from a client with service concerns.

Quality work. This one should go without saying, but Hanson put it into simple terms. The goal, he said, should be to have clients who may say "I want to get it cheaper," but never "I want to get it better."

Best-in-class skills, technology. "Technology is driving our future and we need to embrace it," Hanson said. Clients' communication needs have increased fivefold over the past few years, Zino added. Don't miss the boat on documentation, client access to information or responding to inquiries in real time, he said.

Strong teams. The landscape industry's labor situation shows little promise of improving any time soon. "You've got to treat your people right because the best people in our business are in demand," Hanson said. "The way you'll win is by keeping them on your team."

Zino emphasized the importance of "career pathing," showing employees they have a future with the company and not just a job today. He also said ValleyCrest strives to make its positions rewarding for employees through recognition, such as celebrating wins like positive customer survey results.

The labor component—specifically promoting the Green Industry to young, would-be landscape workers—is an area Zino said the industry as a whole needs to improve if it wants to compete with more glamorous, less labor-intensive and better paying trades.

"Being a gardener is a pretty god-damn good thing," he said. "And we need to talk about it more."

Landscape Management

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Mark Barbour
Project Supervisor
Dennis' 7 Dees
Portland, Oregon

Building a green space in Portland's airspace.

Incoming passengers to Portland International Airport are now greeted by a "green" roof, thanks in part to *Dennis' 7 Dees*, a longtime Portland landscaping and garden center. The eco roof project was huge, at 10,000 sq. ft. They installed a modular tray system and a LEED-certified irrigation system. The work was challenging and Mark Barbour says "we couldn't have done it without the reliability and power of our STIHL products, especially our

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IMMIGRATION REFORM

PLANET/LM survey shows support for citizenship “road map”

With some signs in Congress that immigration reform may happen this year, *Landscape Management* and the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET) partnered on an immigration sentiments survey among members of the landscape and lawn care industry.

The survey was fielded online in February and March, garnering 536 responses with a +/-5 percent margin of error and a 95 percent confidence interval.

It's clear members of the landscape industry believe immigration policy needs to be fixed at the federal level—81 percent of respondents say so. That may be because nearly two-thirds of respondents say they have trouble finding and keeping workers.

Other answers weren't as definitive. For example, on the question, “Should illegal immigrants already here be able to legally work here?” respondents were nearly split, with 45 percent of them saying “yes,” 42 percent of them saying “no” and 13 percent of them unsure.

» WEB EXTRA

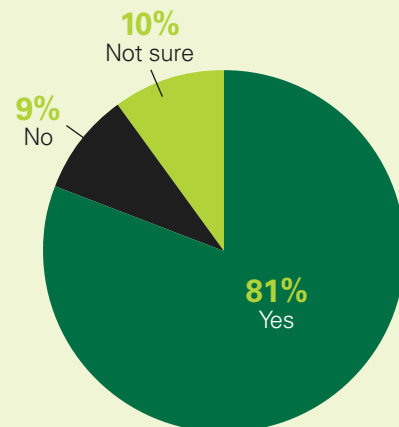
For the full report on landscape industry immigration reform sentiments, visit LandscapeManagement.net.

On a question about an immigration policy that includes a road map to citizenship for immigrants who already live and work in the U.S. and aspire to be citizens, landscape industry members' response—75 percent in support—mirrors the general public's sentiments from a Pew Research Center/*USA Today* survey from last June. That survey found 71 percent of U.S. adults in support of a way for undocumented immigrants to stay in the country legally, if they meet certain requirements.

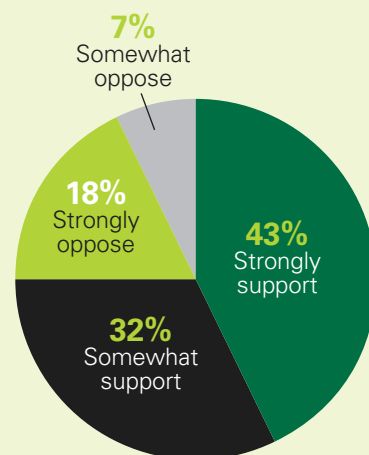
Despite 99 percent of respondents saying it's important they have an all-legal workforce, 39 percent of respondents also say they believe some of their workers' I-9 forms may be backed up with falsified paperwork. More than a third of respondents use E-Verify, voluntarily or because their state requires it, the survey shows.

While most people (81 percent) say they would reach out to their senators and U.S. representatives to ask them to fix the immigration system now, if given the chance, the No. 1 reason respondents who say they wouldn't contact their legislators is they “don't think it would help.” —*Marisa Palmieri*

Do you feel the issue of immigration is important to the landscape industry and needs to be fixed on the federal level?

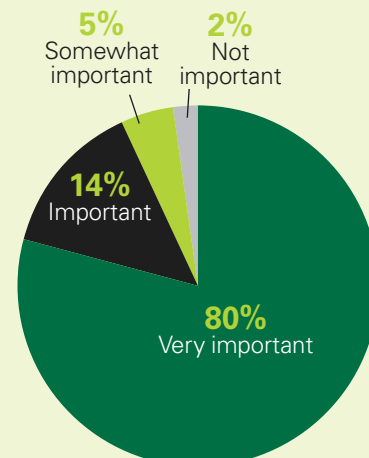


Do you support or oppose a new immigration policy that includes a road map to citizenship for immigrants who already live and work in the United States and aspire to be U.S. citizens?



How important is it to your business to be assured that you have a 100 percent legal workforce?

Numbers don't equal 100% due to rounding.





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NEWS+VIEWS

Scotts testing GMO turfgrass

The Scotts Miracle-Gro Co., based in Marysville, Ohio, will test a genetically modified grass seed in the family lawns of a small number of employees this growing season, *The Columbus (Ohio) Dispatch* reports.

The employees will test Kentucky bluegrass that has been modified to protect it from being killed by Roundup, the herbicide produced by Monsanto and sold by Scotts.

The employee testing "is a major step forward," Scotts CEO Jim Hagedorn told shareholders at their annual meeting Jan. 30, *The Columbus Dispatch* reports. "I think we will see limited commercial activity the following year (2015), and I think, if all goes well, much more (activity) in the consumer market in 2016."

In 2011 the U.S. Department of Agriculture, which regulates genetically modified crops, exempted Scotts' genetically modified Kentucky bluegrass from regulation because of the way the seed was modified.

MAILBOX



Life is short

I just read the comment "Bigger's not better" in Mailbox in the March 2013 issue of *Landscape Management* by Charles Bowers. I applaud his remarks on the continuation of the American ego myth about bigger is better. Every one of the trade magazines that I receive glamorizes companies for how many sales they have and how many employees they have. Please tell us more about these sales. How many coronary problems did these sales cause? How many divorces? I have a small landscape company that's doing just fine. I have time to spend with family, work out at the gym and run the business. Life is short and if I remember correctly what Sam Walton once said, "I would have liked to have spent a little more time with the family" was his only regret.

Rusty Moore

President
The Southern Planter
Spartanburg, S.C.

Kudos? Complaints? Share your thoughts with the *Landscape Management* team by emailing mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net.



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BESTPRACTICES

BRUCE WILSON

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

The long view on customer loyalty

It's easy to say that we go the extra mile for our customers. But do we? Driving business forward often means more than just bending over backward. It can often require making compromises that don't make sense financially but pay off in the long run.

Throughout my career I've based my customer relationship philosophy on the value of my worth, not the worth of my value. What this means is that I don't let the relationship get lost in the fine print. When that happens, the relationship stops being worthwhile.

To achieve this, I've had to take the long view—which often means making a little less over a longer time. It's required that I bend with the winds of change and adapt to shifting preferences. This approach has served me well. Making strategic adjustments over the course of my relationships has rewarded me with “customers for life” and relationships built on a foundation of appreciation and trust.

If you're in service to a company, you're a partner who must also share in the ebb and flow of your customer's business cycles. You need to maneuver around potential deal breakers to win on consistency, even when budgets are tight or when the weather affects production.

Doing more for less can seem counterintuitive to ambitious companies wanting to grow their business faster and increase profit. The prevailing theory is to leverage and use market variables as opportunities to make money. Unfortunately, this can backfire and put companies on a win-lose path.

Consider this winter. Many companies are benefiting from the snow bonanza. As a snow/ice contractor, you have a chance to stick it to your customers. Or, you have a chance to feel their pain. What should you do? Make a bundle now or have them as customers next year when there's no snow to plow?

In the maintenance business, it's best to measure actions against long-term priorities. Choose your actions carefully with an empathetic ear

toward your customer's pain and an eye on keeping their trust. Consider these best practices:

- ▶ Remember the customer is still king and his or her point of view matters. To quote my partner, Tom Oyler, you need to “crawl behind the eyes of your customer.” Develop the skill of seeing things through the eyes of others and you are better able to develop your solutions for their problems.

- ▶ Learn to hear what the customer is not saying. Active listening is like reading between the lines. Sometimes you can learn more from what they're not telling you.

- ▶ Ask better questions. A weak answer comes from a weak question. Eliminate ambiguity by being direct, clear and avoiding ill-conceived messages. Ask important questions in person, not email. You can't read their body language in email.

- ▶ Customer eccentricities are part of the deal. Work with and around them to build trust.

- ▶ Develop listening posts at multiple levels. Have relationships at different levels in your customer's organization, such as owner to owner, account manager to facility manager, etc.

- ▶ Never overpromise. If you under deliver, it's a trust buster.

- ▶ When you have a service glitch—every company has them—admit it, fix it and move on.

- ▶ Hire employees with values that match yours. If you want to have your customers treated with respect and be treated honestly and fairly you must build a team of employees that does the same.

- ▶ Cost is not everything. Know where to skim and where to spend. Customer loyalty is built around the total customer experience from the sale, quality of service, knowing what the customer might like, the ability to deliver and trust.

- ▶ Build a sense of urgency in your organization. Most customers today expect you to have a sense of urgency about their problems and their issues when it comes to their service providers. If their budget cutbacks are top priority, this has to be your priority. Work together for a win-win.

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THE BENCHMARK

JEFF HARKNESS

The author is owner-manager of 3PG Consulting. Reach him at jeff@3PGconsulting.com.

Getting to page one

Companies are being “pitched” daily to spend money on web marketing, and there are many confusing options. Ask yourself this question: “Is my company even on the grid?” If I’m a prospect and I don’t know your name or company, can I find you if I’m searching for a resource? If you’re not on page one as one of the top five listings of the major search engines’ results pages, then you’re simply losing.

Getting noticed takes a great deal of effort and you must make an investment as part of your monthly budget. The good news is if you choose your marketing sources wisely, you’ll earn a positive return.

» WEB EXTRA

Visit the Web Extras section of LandscapeManagement.net for Jeff Harkness’s take on Facebook and LinkedIn advertising.

A word about keywords

It’s important to have the right keywords on your site. Otherwise, people won’t find your site via search. Make sure to include your city and state as keywords. You also need to include location keywords to ensure the right people—people who actually are able to patronize your business—find your site.

Google AdWords

Google has nearly an 80 percent share of the search engine market, so it makes sense you’d want to use it to advertise. Fortunately, Google advertising is made easy through a popular service called Google AdWords. With Google AdWords, you can use video, image and text ads to advertise your services on a platform that boasts millions of searches per day. Once your campaign is all set up, your ads will display to people who search using the keywords you added to your account. When using contextual ads, you can further qualify the people who click your ads by including action keywords, like “buy,” “service,” “emergency,” etc. This means the clicks you receive will have a very good chance to turn into an actual sale. With no long-term commitments, very little money down (\$20) and access to one of the largest segments of the Internet population, AdWords is an extremely powerful tool.

The Good: AdWords represents the largest segment of your customers in one place, and your ads

show based on their search intent. This creates a powerful combination that can lead to a staggering amount of clicks and potential business.

The Bad: Everyone else knows this, so you have a lot of competition. Prices per click are higher than Bing due to more competition.

Expert Tips: Turn off Google partners to only show ads to Google.com users to get the highest quality clicks. Also keep a close eye on your budget—you can spend literally thousands of dollars a day if you don’t have your budget settings correct.

Bing Ads

Microsoft’s search engine Bing offers another option: Bing Ads. Bing Ads combines Bing with Yahoo to create the second largest search engine segment, at about 15 percent of web searches. Options are similar to Google’s and you can import your Google campaign directly into Bing, so the cost of moving your campaign to Bing is very low.

The Good: Bing is typically cheaper and converts better than Google, probably due to less competition. For instance, I see Bing traffic is about 20 percent cheaper than Google and that visitor has a 10 percent to 20 percent higher chance of calling or emailing us.


The Bad: You’ll get great traffic that converts to customers, but the numbers are too low to focus entirely on Bing.

Expert Tips: It’s very important to exclude website partners, so make sure you’re only advertising on Bing.com and Yahoo.com. Keep a close eye on your traffic. If you’re not converting at or better than Google, you need to evaluate your account. There are many fraudulent clicks on this network, so be on top of it by reviewing your numbers frequently. Bing’s customer service is good; call if anything looks strange.

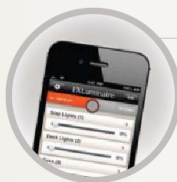
Remember, these are “measurable” items. Tracking leads is a must. If you’re not generating more money than you’re spending, it’s time to reevaluate your marketing efforts and relationships. Prospects are looking for services daily by using their handheld devices. I ask you again. Are you on the grid? That means page one.



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ANNUALS

Annual weeds germinate from seed, grow, mature and die in less than 12 months. Preemergent herbicides containing isoxaben or dithiopyr are excellent control agents for winter and summer annual weeds. Apply several weeks prior to germination.

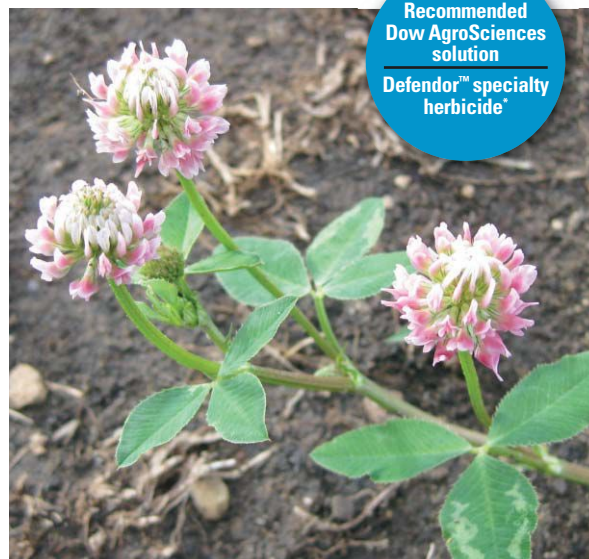
WINTER ANNUALS

- Germinate in fall through early spring, when soil temperatures and moisture levels are favorable.
- Mature and flower in the spring and early summer.
- Set seed and die at the onset of high summer temperatures.

- Broadleaf winter annuals include henbit, lawn burweed and speedwell.
- Grassy winter annuals include annual bluegrass and downy brome.

SUMMER ANNUALS

- Germinate in spring through summer, as temperatures rise and soil moisture is adequate.
- Mature, set seed and die in the fall.
- Broadleaf summer annuals include common lespedeza (pictured), black medic and spurge.
- Grassy summer annuals include crabgrass, goosegrass and green foxtail.



PERENNIALS/BIENNIALS

Postemergent herbicides containing florasulam or clopyralid can provide excellent control of many perennial and biennial weeds.

PERENNIALS

- Perennials, such as white clover (pictured), live for three or more years.
- Most perennial weeds reproduce from seed and/or vegetative structures, such as roots or tubers.
- Simple perennials spread by seed. However, if cut, pieces may produce new plants.
- Dandelion, curly dock and plantain are simple perennials that can grow

actively during cool and warm weather.

BIENNIALS

- Biennials complete their life cycle within two years.
- Biennial plants bloom, set seed and die in their second year. The first year of development is mainly to grow food stores in the roots.
- Common biennial weeds include bull thistle, musk thistle and wild carrot.
- Many biennials are sometimes listed as short-lived perennials because, under certain environmental conditions, they do not complete their life cycle in the second year.

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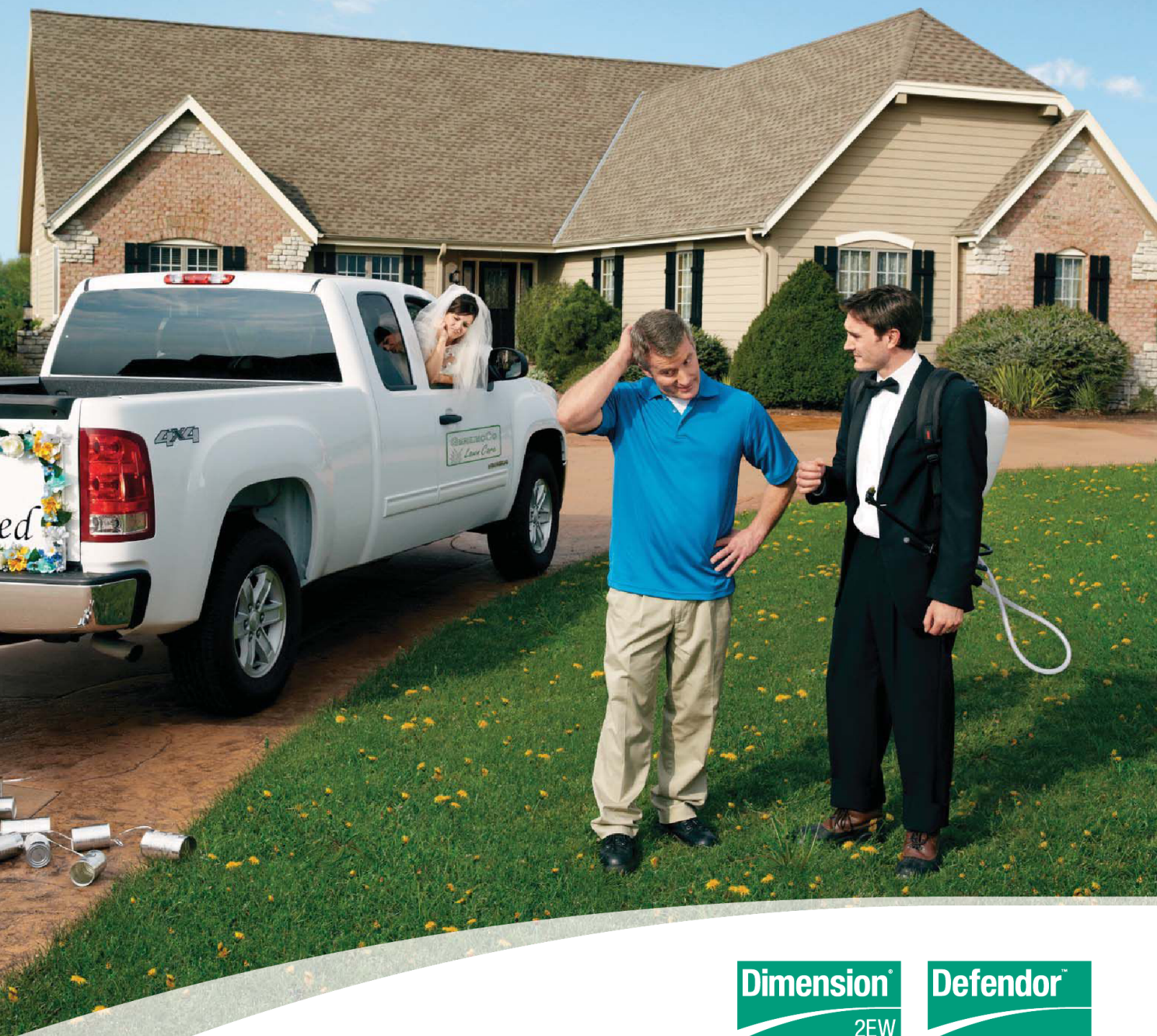
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BY ANITA ALEXANDER, DOW AGROSCIENCES FIELD SCIENTIST

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SAME TREE,



Brothers Roscoe (left) and Brook Klausing started maintaining landscapes at a young age alongside their father, Bob, who was a city landscape supervisor. Right: A young Brook Klausing assists his father with pruning.

different branches

Talking to the Klausing brothers is like addressing two sides of the same brain.

On the left is the oldest, Roscoe Klausing, 37, president and CEO of Klausing Group, a \$2.8 million commercial grounds maintenance firm in Lexington, Ky. He's genuine.

Logical. A planner. On the right side younger brother Brook Klausing, 36, owner of \$1.5 million, New York City-based Brook Landscape, is an artistic risk taker.

Their mutual passion for beautifying environments and business success sprouted from the same seed. It's rooted in the same soil in Lexington, where they grew up the sons of a city landscape supervisor and a registered nurse. They cultivated it together as young men, first to earn spending money and then as a true business. But today, the branch each brother has chosen is very different.

"Even though Brook has the design/build company and I've got the grounds management company, we both are really big fans of design," Roscoe Klausing says. "It inspires us both and it comes out in different ways."

→GETTING THERE

It's fall 1997 and 20-year-old Roscoe Klausing hits the road in his 1992 Honda Accord to head back to Earlham College in Richmond, Ind., from Lexington.

He just spent the long, fall-break weekend of his first year of college in his hometown, helping his younger brother with the landscape business the pair built steadily since they

were in tenth and eighth grades, respectively. In fact, they'd been cutting grass and doing jobs around their neighborhood for much longer than that.

"I'm driving back, and I'd just worked 50 or 60 hours helping Brook get caught up because he was so behind," Roscoe Klausing recalls. "I said to myself, 'What am I doing?' I should be back there with Brook and the business."

On that very car ride he decided he was done with school.

He completed the semester, but before it was over began negotiating a lease for an office and warehouse so the budding company, Klausing Lawn Mowing, could move out of the family garage.

By summertime, the co-owners joined the Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA), now part of the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). They attended the annual meeting in Baltimore in 1999, the predecessor to today's Green Industry Conference.

"It was there I saw what was possible," Roscoe Klausing says. "I was introduced to people who were entrepreneurs first and who happened to be in the world of landscape contracting."

Soon after the brothers began working on—and executing—a business plan. By 2001 they replaced all of their residential maintenance, design/build and bid/build work for commercial maintenance contracts. At the time they were doing about \$400,000 in revenue. They also rebranded the company to Klausing Group.

"Because we only had about a dozen people at the most, we chose Klausing Group," Roscoe Klausing says. "We realized we needed to project an image to give

people confidence, so we came out with a very, I think, classic-looking logo and a name that might lead people to believe we were much larger than we were."

The move to 100 percent maintenance was a better fit for the older Klausing, though.

"Commercial grounds maintenance suited me better than Brook," Roscoe Klausing says. "This wasn't the sexy side of the industry or it wasn't the one everyone wanted to be in, like it is today."

That same year, just before Sept. 11, Brook Klausing went on a week-long vacation to New York.

"There was an energy here that blew me away that I didn't ever feel in Kentucky," Brook Klausing says of New York. Upon his return home, his mind was made up that he'd move. The brothers immediately began planning to transition him out of the business. He relocated to New York the following year.

→RIGHT BRAIN

Soon after arriving in New York, Brook Klausing landed landscape maintenance work for a short time and then quit the

continued on page 22

What started as a sibling lawn mowing endeavor for the Klausing brothers has grown into two distinct and thriving landscape businesses.

BY MARISA PALMIERI





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DIFFERENT BRANCHES

continued from page 19

industry for a few years. It was during an internship at an architecture firm he put the pieces together.

"That's when I learned carpentry and realized construction and architecture were the missing link between me enjoying where I came from," he says. "I learned how to design and produce projects—I hadn't done that before. I was strictly dirt, plants and maintenance for so many years."

In 2006, Brook Klausing founded landscape design/build and management firm Brook Landscape and has grown it to about \$1.5 million in 2013 with 15 employees. The company designs, constructs and manages urban gardens with "classic materials in a contemporary way" with a variety of methods, including carpentry, masonry and steel fabrication. Brook Klausing also is a licensed general contractor.

The company is booked through the end of 2014 and is recruiting so it can add capacity and accept work in other locations, such as Los Angeles. It also plans to advance its growth prospects by subcontracting out construction services, focusing on serving as a general contractor for those and by expanding its horticulture management division.

"(Horticulture) is the reason clients call us," he says. "It's the finished product, the icing on the cake, so I want it to

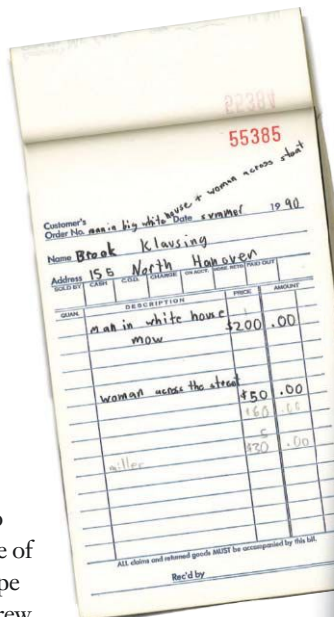
be as strong as possible."

Growing a design/build firm seems like work enough, but Brook Klausing also manages a second career—that of a fashion model. He was "discovered" about five years ago when he landed one of his first big landscape design jobs for J. Crew Creative Director Jenna Lyons. After the project, she asked him to be in a J. Crew photo shoot featuring "real guys," and he's picked up other modeling jobs from there.

Though reluctant to talk about his modeling career, which he described to Details.com as "a great way to meet amazing people and earn extra cash," the benefits of his artistic side job are not lost on the younger Klausing, who's largely self taught as a designer.

"Working with other designers and creative directors has been and still is amazing," he says. "It's more like a collaboration and I'm the interpreter."

Not to mention the who's-who aspect of the modeling industry. "From a net-



Roscoe Klausing saved some receipts and fliers from the brothers' first foray into business.



working standpoint, it's good to know taste makers, trendsetters and the folks that report on what's happening," he acknowledges.

Knowing the reporters has done Brook Klausing some good. The PR he's gained as a model/landscape designer is the only form of marketing he's ever pursued, he says. He's been featured in the *New York Times*, *Garden Design* and *Delta's Sky*, among other media outlets.

"I don't do any advertising; I only do press," he says. "I could do (advertising), but my growth rate is stunted by the ability to produce, not the amount to sell."

continued on page 24; sidebar on page 23



Roscoe (left) and Brook Klausing pose with the sign from their first business, which evolved into Klausing Group.

Inspiration INTO ACTION

Some things have changed at Klausung Group over the years. One that hasn't: the company's commitment to community stewardship.

Going back to when the Klausung brothers wrote their first business plan, Roscoe Klausung says the company always has tried to be "a good corporate citizen."

"I wanted to give back on a regular basis without having to think about it," he says, noting he got the idea to set aside a portion of the company's earnings from Patagonia. The outdoor clothing and gear brand pledges 1 percent of sales to preserving and restoring the environment through its 1% For The Planet program.

Initially, Klausung Group followed suit, committing 1 percent of top-line revenue toward providing services to local nonprofits with grounds maintenance needs. Eventually the company changed its program to 5% For The Community, setting aside 5 percent of net profit to the same cause.

"We sign a contract with the organizations to take over their grounds," Klausung says. "We do the contract so they know we're serious. Technically, they're one-year contracts, but we've never stopped doing work for anybody."

Today, the program maintains about six sites, including a food bank.

It's successful in its simplicity, Klausung says. "Our staff, in many cases, doesn't even know when it's working on a site that's a donation," he says.

There has been one hiccup: One recipient acquired another facility, increasing the size of its grounds from one acre to 15 acres. Klausung Group committed to letting this organization be a repeat recipient of the award for the next few years so it can continue service.

Each annual contract has a value of about \$20,000, Klausung says, tallying the program's lifetime giving near \$200,000.

"I'd so much rather do community service this way than every six months to rally troops on a Saturday," he says. "I'd rather be able to plan for it and know what our expenses are going to be instead of donating whenever we're asked."



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DIFFERENT BRANCHES

continued from page 22

As it turns out, there are many barriers to growing a landscape business in New York City, not the least of which are labor and material costs. Though, those aren't the things that plague Brook Klausing the most.

"It's the red tape involved in architecture and construction in New York versus an area like Lexington," he says. "In New York, you can't do anything without someone saying 'stop' or 'you owe us money.'"

The highly regulated atmosphere also creates a lot of stop and go for Brook Landscape. "You can get a stop-work order from a building inspector from an anonymous phone call," he says. "You have to be involved in enough opportunities to constantly have the ability to switch over to another project."

That's not always easy for someone who describes himself as "impatient." Brook Klausing estimates his jobs take twice as long as a comparable job would

take in a suburban market. An average design/build project takes a few months but could drag on for a year.

"You have to have a trick up your sleeve all the time," he says. "It's having consistent flexibility and problem-solving skills."

→LEFT BRAIN

For Roscoe Klausing, the differences between his and his brother's businesses are most outwardly evident in their facilities.

"He has a warehouse in Brooklyn; it's largely a design studio in one section and a fabrication facility in the other," Roscoe Klausing says. Then, he describes his digs, chuckling: "I've got 2 acres that would be worth millions of dollars in Brooklyn."

How each brother sells his services also shows the distinction between them.

"I find that much of what my brother sells in New York City is a

» WEB EXTRA

Ever read *Growing Dreams* by Jim Paluch? Visit LandscapeManagement.net to learn about how the Klausings inspired the book's characters.

personal relationship with him," he says. "He's a hip, fashionable guy. He's providing something that's quite unique and that very

few people can do. A lot of people can do what Klausing Group does, and we have to figure out a way to set ourselves apart. It's a different approach."

Roscoe Klausing has found a way to make Klausing Group stand out with its systems-oriented approach to caring for customers and the community (see "Inspiration into action," page 23).

The company grossed about \$2.8 million in 2013 and is budgeted for the same in 2014, though after this winter's windfall



Oh, BROTHERS



ROSCOE KLAUSING

*President and CEO
Klausing Group
Lexington, Ky.*

65% commercial grounds management; 35% design/build and bid/build work for those accounts
2013 revenue: \$2.8 million

→Roscoe on...

Brook: "I had no idea he

had it in him to do what he's doing right now, doing the projects he's doing and working with clientele he works with."

Their early days: "I still have some of the first invoices we gave to customers where we differentiated \$3 to cut the back lawn or \$2 to cut the front."

Company that inspires him: Patagonia

What's next? Klausing Group opened a new branch an hour away in Louisville, Ky. "At this point it's more of a satellite production facility than a branch," he says. "We have one seven-man crew based in Louisville. The hope would be that it will be operating as a proper branch within two years."

Moonlights as: Husband to Elizabeth McLaren and father to 5-year-old Sara.

BROOK KLAUSING

*Owner and creative director
Brook Landscape
Brooklyn, N.Y.*

Design/build and management firm, primarily for residential accounts
2013 revenue: About \$1.5 million

→Brook on...

Roscoe: "He's a smart, talented fair individual ruled by ethics and idealism. He's the type of person I'd want to do business with."

Their early days: "I've cut enough lawns to make me want to puke."

Companies that inspire him: "BDDW and Italian designer Paola Lenti both make amazing furniture and have great brand identity. I'm inspired by designers that push the envelope but don't look like they're trying too hard."

What's next? By the end of 2014, he'll launch Natural Workshop, a line of outdoor living products. "It's a slow start but I'm very excited to create products that I want to use."

Moonlights as: A model for brands such as J. Crew, among others. Was featured in holiday TV commercial for MasterCard.





Klausing Group changed all of its business over to commercial grounds maintenance in the early 2000s.

intimate space with custom planter boxes and potted trees and shrubs.

"We have different strengths, which is really evident in the companies we have today," Roscoe Klausing says, acknowledging the brothers had trouble finding ways to complement their strengths when they were partners. "I've seen the work Brook does. It's the exact opposite side of

the industry of what I do. Our personalities really reflect that, too."

Brook Klausing thinks back to the days of the original business in Kentucky.

"Here's the difference between Roscoe and I," he says. "I could get clients and he could produce."

"If we were ever partners again, we'd kill it." **LM**

Roscoe Klausing expects to exceed that. (The company met its snow budget for 2014 on Jan. 15.)

To get a taste of the older Klausing's methodical approach to business, listen to him describe an internal analysis of addressing client callbacks, which became a problem in September 2012.

"We realized at a strategic planning meeting that one of the main characteristics of our company—response time—had become a weakness," he says. "We doubled down and made an internal commitment to resolve every single customer issue within 48 hours, no matter what. We started tracking it from when we noticed the issue or when the customer called in with one. It could be anything from an incorrect invoice to a tree planted in the wrong place."

The leadership team devised a procedure to route all customer calls into the same location. There's now a protocol for taking the customer call, which is logged into a system and pushed out to an account manager, who promptly calls the client for instructions. Once the conflict is resolved on the production end, the person who accepted the phone call follows up with the client to ensure it's been taken care of to satisfaction.

"Closing that loop was really important," Roscoe Klausing says, sharing the average issue is now resolved in 24 hours. "We've seen better contract renewal. Although I don't have a way to connect that to issue resolution, we've had customers say, 'You guys were on chopping block because we were so fed up with response time.' We tell them we call 2012 a blip."

→ DISTINCT STRENGTHS

The same satisfaction in Roscoe Klausing's voice as he describes overcoming the "blip" surfaces when his brother describes transforming a rooftop garden into an

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Word-of-web referrals



How landscape professionals are using Porch, a new online home improvement platform.

BY SARAH PFLEDDERER

Like many small business owners, most of Mike Champagne's leads come from word-of-mouth referrals—75 percent, he says.

It's not that the owner of American Blade Runners Lawn care in Charlotte, N.C., hasn't tried other means of marketing. There was the time he distributed 5,000 fliers, but that only got him one call. It's disappointments like these that led to his reliance on referrals.

And it's for that reason he's putting some of his trust in the website Porch as an extension of his word-of-mouth marketing.

The online home improvement network connects homeowners and professionals for free and does so by vetting companies on the same values neighbors do when referring others to a business, such as a company's service

perimeters, pricing and quality of service.

Porch CEO Matt Ehrlichman created the company about two years ago from a homeowner's perspective, using it as a solution to some of the struggles he faced when building his home.

"It's so hard to have any idea what it's going to cost and it's so challenging to know who really is going to be the best professional to work with for my specific home," he says. "Porch was started to make that process easier for homeowners and to help professionals and small businesses around the country be able to get not just more business but the right kind of business."

It achieves this through populating Porch profiles with photos of professionals' projects, including details on those such as the project cost and location. Porch uses that information, in addition to the number of "positive endorsements," to determine where a professional will fall in a homeowner's search rankings.

"We use data and information home-

owners are going to have a tremendous amount of confidence in," Ehrlichman says.

The company had a relatively quiet launch in 2013, officially going live in September, but it had reached out to professionals to join the site more than a year in advance. Of the 1.5 million home improvement professionals on the site, 4 percent identify as "landscapers," according to Porch.

Darwin Webb, president of Darwin Webb Landscape Architects in Issaquah, Wash., was one of the initial professionals contacted to join the site.

"After a couple conversations, I instantly saw the value in what they were doing," he says. "They really took the lead on helping me set up my profile."

Promotional perks

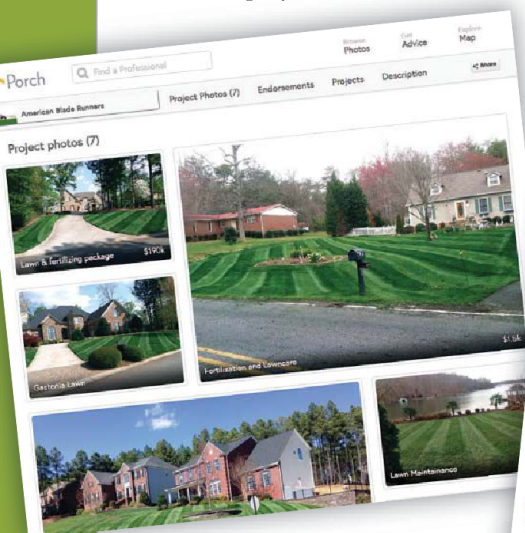
While Webb hasn't gotten any leads directly through Porch yet, he sees it as a more reliable customer referral source than other home improvement sites.

"There's certainly no downside to trying (Porch) out and if you're not getting what you think you need out of them, you can always bow out," he says.

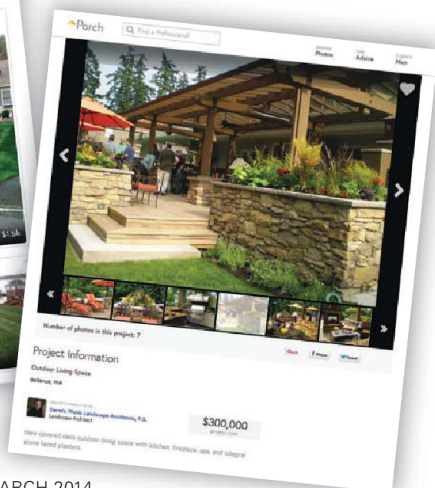
And this is somewhat Webb's plan. He's waiting to see results from his profile before dishing out an optional \$35 monthly subscription fee to heighten his marketability through Porch.

It is free for professionals to enroll and run a Porch profile, but by paying a subscription fee, which is how Porch profits, professionals' projects can be highlighted in Porch's marketing materials, such as emails sent to homeowners.

continued on page 28



In addition to photos, Porch urges users to upload project pricing and location details.





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The fee does not increase professionals' visibility on the Porch website itself to ensure homeowners are seeing the most highly endorsed companies in their area, not the ones who pay the most for a higher ranking.

"In different places, we can proactively give them more exposure and highlight them, but we do that without breaking the trust of homeowners," Ehrlichman says.

An added layer to Porch's marketing comes from the company's strategic partnership with Lowe's, which was announced in January.

Through the partnership, signage in Lowe's stores informs customers to refer to Porch to find a local professional to help them with their project. Moreover, Lowe's employees are trained to connect customers to Porch professionals in store for services the retailer doesn't offer.

That partnership initially was instituted in 139 stores in North Carolina, South Carolina and the Seattle area, where Porch is headquartered. It will gradually roll out to more than 1,700 Lowe's stores.

Champagne says he's already seen signs in his local Lowe's and expects that exposure to generate more leads for him via Porch, especially in the spring when outdoor projects are top of mind for customers. Although, like Webb, he has yet to receive any leads through Porch.

Reliability distinguishers

The Lowe's partnership is a prime way Porch now sets itself aside from competitors, such as Angie's List, Yelp and Houzz, Ehrlichman says. Another distinction is Porch doesn't allow users to post negative reviews at this time to avoid professionals being "gamed" by competitors.

"Professionals right now use Porch as their definitive resume, so we want that to positively represent their work," Ehrlichman says. "At some point it's important to create an experience for homeowners where they get all of the information they need.

Before we do any of that stuff, we want to do a very good job of verifying it's a homeowner who's actually used that professional."

Thus, negative reviews eventually will be a part of the site for the homeowner's benefit, Ehrlichman says, but the company is figuring ways to ensure posts are authentic before launching the feature.

For the time being, Porch merely allows homeowners to provide "positive endorsements" of companies. The

CEO Matt Ehrlichman's tip sheet for Porch users to increase their visibility on the site:

- 1 Upload as many projects as possible, making sure to include their addresses and pricing, so Porch knows which customers to target for you.
- 2 Provide customer email addresses to Porch for it to garner endorsements for your page.
- 3 Post a headshot of yourself on the site to personalize your page.

more endorsements a company has, the more viewable they are to neighbors of the person who endorsed them.

"That's where homeowners have the most confidence," Ehrlichman says, referring back to the notion that neighborly referrals are viewed as the most trustworthy.

But how does Porch know whose neighbor is whose? In uploading projects to their Porch profiles, professionals are encouraged to provide the project's addresses.

"That gives us the insight to know when to feature that professional correctly," Ehrlichman says, clarifying that Porch never shows a customers' address on the website. "We anonymize it. It's completely private." (See map example at left.)

Another detail professionals are encouraged to include is the price of the projects. Porch says this information helps homeowners quickly identify the company as being in their price range or not.

Including such details—location and pricing—are entirely optional, though.

Champagne, for instance, only posts the price of his residential projects, not the commercial ones.

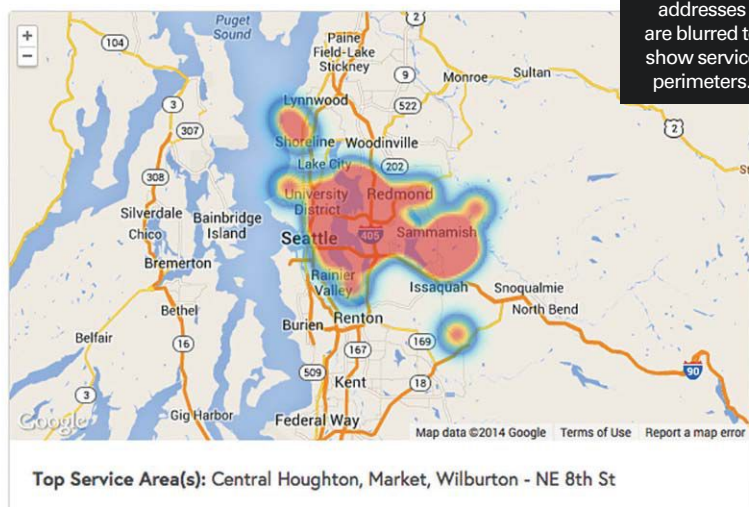
"That's kind of like putting your bids out for everybody to see," he says.

Profile creation, upkeep

There are two ways to build a profile: 1). manually uploading projects and photos or 2). sending a spreadsheet of project data, such as through Excel, to the Porch team

continued on page 31

Project locations





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PRESENTERS:

APPLICATOR SPEAKER:



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TECHNICAL SPEAKER:



Jeff Derr, Ph.D.

*Professor of Weed Science
Virginia Tech*

Derr provides weed management information to commercial landscape maintenance firms and lawn care professionals and oversees the turfgrass evaluation program at the Hampton Roads Agricultural Research and Extension Center, among other research and extension duties at Virginia Tech. He has a doctorate degree in horticulture/weed science from North Carolina State University.

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continued from page 28

for it to import to the profile. It's on that spreadsheet where professionals provide project addresses, pricing and customer email addresses if they'd like the company to request endorsements for them.

Although Porch employees are hands on with helping professionals set up their profiles, they do not upload the information from spreadsheets by hand, so to speak. That data importation process is completed using "a combination of employee curation and proprietary software" the company wrote to process spreadsheets, Ehrlichman says.

Champagne, who joined Porch in November, chose to manually upload his projects, and he did so right from his phone. Still, he says, Porch employees were very involved in his profile building process.

"They are determined to try to make sure you have your information out there so they can better promote you," he says. "They'll hound me to death on pictures or endorsements from my customers."

Champagne's greatest struggle with the site is setting aside time to upload recent projects, plus he prefers to post before-and-after photos once his installation jobs have filled in, which can take up to a year.

He has nine projects uploaded to his profile. Webb, who has been on Porch almost a year longer, has 54 projects listed.

"The more projects, the better," Webb says. "The more projects you have photos of, the better."

Because Porch profiles are highly photo-driven, Webb says he's extra attentive to the quality of project photos he uploads to the site.

"Having pictures of projects, is more valuable than descriptions," he says.

"Images are always better than words and

good images are always better than poor images." (See Web Extra.)

Webb recalls going the spreadsheet route when building his pro-

file and says his projects were uploaded smoothly and reliably.

"I'm not the best at computer stuff, but they were very helpful," he says. "It doesn't matter if you're a CAD guy, an IT guy or just a design professional. They make it pretty easy."

His single criticism, however, is the placement of the projects on his profile.

"That's the one thing that I'm still not crazy about. I want to be able to rearrange the way in which the photos are presented," he says. "I'm not 100 percent satisfied yet."

Once Webb has his projects organized to standard, he says then he'll press customers to view and endorse his profile. **LM**

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For advice from photographer Tiffany Morisue on capturing and posting web-friendly images to sites such as Porch, visit the Web Extras section at LandscapeManagement.net.

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ABOUT THE HOST

Jody Shilan, MLA is an award-winning landscape designer and former landscape design/build contractor, who has sold tens of millions of dollars of design and installation work throughout his career. He now uses his 35+ years of experience to coach other landscape contractors how to easily and dramatically increase their sales by following his unique landscape design/build sales process. He does this through public speaking, private consulting, group workshops and his "exclusive" members-only website www.FromDesign2Build.com.



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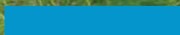


MARKETWATCH

SERVICE SEGMENT SNAPSHOTS

Green infrastructure projects like rain gardens are on the rise. Here's why Green Industry professionals should clue in on this trend.

PAGE 42



Covering your bases

Company owners protect their assets with noncompete agreements. *By EMILY SCHAPPACHER*

When Dennis Topo discovered a former employee of Allison Lawn & Landscape Service was trying to recruit clients from the company to start his own business, he issued a cease and desist letter on the grounds that the individual was in violation of a signed noncompete agreement. The contract bars former employees from contacting Allison customers for one year after termination. The letter was enough to resolve the situation, but Topo, director of operations, says without the noncompete agreement, there was little else he could have done to protect the Tampa, Fla.-based company and its assets.

“We are a family-owned business and our employees are considered assets to the company,” Topo says of Allison, which has a 75 percent residential and 25 percent commercial client base and generates less than \$1 million annually. “But those assets come with intellectual property and when those assets leave, we want to make sure we retain the intellectual property that is our customers. It’s pretty much basic business administration for a small company.”

Kevin Kehoe, owner of 3PG Consulting, says “non-compete agreement” tends to be a loosely-used term. He clarifies there are three types of legal contracts that can help landscape company owners protect what is rightfully theirs: traditional noncompetes, nonsolicitations and confidentiality agreements.

A traditional noncompete agreement is a contract under which an employee agrees not to enter into or start an enterprise that competes with an employer for a designated number of years after the employee leaves the company. These can be difficult and expensive to enforce, particularly in states with right-to-work laws, Kehoe says. Noncompetes, he adds, typically apply to higher-level employees, such as partners, those with equity in the firm or those with significant customer interaction. They are not the type of agreement necessary for maintenance workers or hourly employees, Kehoe says.

“Employers invest time, dollars and training into their employees. For that person to become a competitor is something the employer should limit as much as possible.”

—Richard Lehr



Nonsolicitation agreements prevent employees from trying to recruit clients or staff from their former employers. Confidentiality agreements prevent former employees from disclosing propriety information, such as trade secrets and client data, to a third party. As long as the terms of these documents, which pertain to a length of time and geographic area, are detailed and specific, Kehoe says they are highly enforceable in most states.

“You can’t keep a person from making a living in the same industry, but you can certainly put some teeth into the non-solicitation and confidentiality agreements,” Kehoe says. “It should just be standard practice to have them. Otherwise, you can rely on the good faith, honesty and loyalty of people, but good luck with that in life.”

Richard Lehr, general counsel for the Professional Landscape Network (PLANET), says these types of agreements are particularly useful in the Green Industry, which is perceived to have easy, low-cost entry. While there are generic versions of noncompetes available on the Internet, Lehr recommends business owners have a lawyer create a document specifically for their company that incorporates the nuances of their state



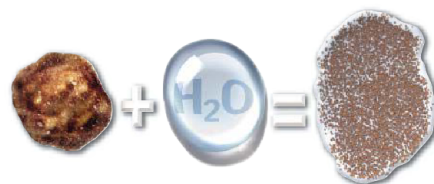


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laws. The agreements should be reevaluated annually or whenever there's a change in the business structure, such as with the addition of new locations or services. The terms and conditions should vary based on the type of employee, Lehr adds. For example, managers and sales team members may be restricted from working for specific competitors for two years, while an hourly maintenance worker may only be restricted for one.

"Noncompetes are advisable and necessary to protect a business," Lehr says. "Employers invest time, dollars and training into their employees. For that person to become a competitor is something the employer should limit as much as possible."

Kenneth LaVoie, owner of LaVoie's Landscape Management in Winslow, Maine,

requires employees and subcontractors to sign noncompete agreements. The contract ensures his \$110,000 company has the rights to any potential work a subcontractor encounters while on a LaVoie's Landscape Management job and prohibits subcontractors and employees from doing business with LaVoie's clients, which are all residential, for a period of five years. While LaVoie says it's unlikely his company would have the resources to enforce the agreement, he uses it as a precautionary measure to encourage current and former employees to do the right thing.

"Noncompete agreements are like locks on doors," he says. "They are there to keep the dishonest people in line."

Schappacher is a freelance writer based in Charlotte, N.C.

SAYING "NO" TO NONCOMPETES

Steven Jomides, president of Lawns by Yorkshire in Westwood, N.J., is one contractor who doesn't think noncompete agreements make the best business sense. The \$10-million company, which offers commercial maintenance services, used to require employees to sign noncompetes, but Jomides recently stopped putting as much emphasis on them. He says his philosophy is simple: "If you offer good service and you make your customers happy, regardless of who comes and goes, you should keep your customers."

Jomides says the costs to draft, maintain and enforce noncompete agreements outweighed any benefits his company saw in return. He also found the contracts difficult and time-consuming to enforce. Plus, there was the potential to upset clients if they were to get caught in the middle of a legal scuffle.

"Noncompetes aggravate everyone and, from a business perspective, I don't think it's a good decision," Jomides says. "We hire people who bring work in, and people who leave take work with them. We have come to accept that as part of doing business."



Some experts believe Jomides may have the right idea. A recent *Harvard Business Review* article—authored by On Amir, associate professor of marketing at University of California, San Diego, and Orly Lobel, a professor of labor and employment law at the University of San Diego—reports noncompete clauses are a standard feature of many employment contracts, but they often can be a double-edged sword.

Research shows innovation, productivity and economic growth all are greater in parts of the country where noncompete agreements are not permitted or enforced. The authors also conclude limits on future employment decrease workers' perceived ownership of their jobs and diminish their desires to exert themselves and develop their skills—factors that can be more detrimental to a company's success than the actual loss of the employee.

"Given today's increasingly mobile labor market and the heightened competition in many industries, it's understandable that companies want to guard their talent closely," the authors write. "But if the walls meant to protect human capital diminish the quality of the capital, they may not be worth building."

The Ticker:

MAINTENANCE

Paramount Landscape & Maintenance, a \$3.2 million firm in Chandler, Ariz., was acquired by a private investor Jan. 31. Terms were not disclosed.



Following its acquisition of Knoxville, Tenn.-based **Cortese Tree Specialists**, **Davey Tree Expert Co.** opened seven new branch offices. They are located in Austin, Texas; Baltimore; Chicago; Detroit; Napa, Calif.; Pittsburgh; and St. Louis.

In a deal with undisclosed terms, the **Brickman Group** purchased **Metheny Commercial Lawn Maintenance**, located in Dallas. The acquisition marks Brickman's first M&A move since it was acquired by investment firm KKR in November.

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Service relief

Jerry McKay sheds light on how hiring a lighting service tech freed his team from the burden of service calls. *By SARAH PFLEDDERER*

When eight landscape lighting professionals gathered for The Lighting Summit 2014, hosted by McKay Landscape Lighting Jan. 22-23 in Omaha, Neb., their conversations went beyond manufacturer preferences and installation methods.

In fact, the conference touched on none of that. Somewhere between the peer-to-peer networking, chatter about marketing techniques and a tour of McKay's facility and projects, Jerry McKay brought up a topic that prompted every head to nod in agreement.

"Service sometimes gets in the way of your business," the owner of McKay Landscape Lighting said, and recalled when it was worst for his company.

It was 17 years ago, when McKay Landscape Lighting was a \$250,000 company and had two two-man crews.

"We got so many service calls in the early days," McKay said. His employees struggled to keep up on installations and existing customers were disgruntled with slow response times.

McKay's solution: Delegate the service jobs to a single person, a service tech.



McKay Landscape Lighting has two service techs on staff.

Now a \$1 million to \$2 million company with two service techs, McKay said the company's service department reels in 25 percent of its annual revenue.

PREPARING FOR THE HIRE

As with any move that will grow a company, there are costs associated with forming a tech position. McKay said he looked at it as "creating another profit center."

Thorough planning, he adds, is key to onboarding a service tech.

Before hiring, map out a job description that addresses what that person will be doing in their downtime, such as taking inventory, cleaning the shop or doing small installs and upgrades, because they won't be busy with service calls 40 hours per week at first—that will come later, McKay said.

In terms of investing in the position, McKay purchased a new truck, toolboxes, a ladder rack and a surplus of lighting supplies—bulbs, wires, transformers, etc.—to fill the vehicle.

"It's gotta be like Noah's ark," McKay said. "He's gotta have a couple of everything."

It's equally important to equip techs with information, he said. Give them access to job histories, such as notes on the original install, any add-ons and past service calls. McKay's techs have netbooks that allow them to log in remotely to access customers' job histories.

THE IDEAL CANDIDATE

Hiring a service tech is "an art," McKay

The Ticker: DESIGN/BUILD

The **American Society of Landscape Architects** unveiled findings from its 2014 Residential Landscape Architecture Trends Survey, which showed lighting, low-maintenance landscapes and native plants to be in demand. The category of gardens and landscaped spaces received a 94 percent rating as somewhat or very popular.

Outdoor living spaces were second most popular at 92 percent. Visit ow.ly/ubWwX for the full results.

John Deere debuted its 4 Family of compact utility tractors. The units, with Final Tier 4 engines, will hit dealerships in April.



Lighting professionals exchange their companies' marketing materials at The Lighting Summit 2014.

said. Their mindset is everything and it must strike a balance between being detail orientated and quick.

Not all installers, for example, are good for service because of their extreme attention to detail. They may want to check every fixture on a project, but that's not what the customer called them for, McKay said.

On the other hand, a service tech must be meticulous enough to realize offsets in a system that need to be addressed, such as if a timer is incorrect.

Service techs must be focused on fixing only the problem they're called for but have the communication skills to suggest other enhancements to clients, McKay adds.

"You want that person within your business to have good people skills," he said. "It's hard to have a service tech that doesn't speak well in front of clients."

KNOWING WHEN TO MAKE THE JUMP

McKay said most business owners will know inherently when it's time to boost their service department by adding a tech. Typically, he says, it's when clients are dissatisfied or service calls are slowing down your installation processes.

One of the most difficult parts of that decision is overcoming the financial nervousness of adding a new position, McKay said. But business owners must realize service is a make-it

or break-it component of any business, he said.

"Without it, you wouldn't have a business," he said. "Either you embrace it and make a good ROI or it will sink your business."

For some perspective, McKay

returned to the bullet point that service calls make up a quarter of his company's revenue. That cash flow alone is twice the annual revenue of the landscape company he sold in 1998.

"That's a pretty strong ROI statement," McKay said.

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The green infrastructure opportunity

Irrigation and landscape pros can brighten their futures by acting as resources to water quality managers. *By* MARISA PALMIERI



Rain gardens, like this one at the Brooklyn (N.Y.) Botanic Garden, are considered an element of green infrastructure.

The green infrastructure movement is growing in communities throughout the U.S. as a way to manage stormwater in urban environments while having a positive impact on the ecosystem.

To be more specific about what green infrastructure is, the Irrigation Association's (IA) John Farner turned to U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA's) definition during a webinar in January, titled "Green Infrastructure: The Role of Stormwater Management." That is: "Green infrastructure uses vegetation, soils and natural processes to manage water and create healthier urban environments."

Why is this an important topic for irrigation and landscape professionals, Farner asked rhetorically? His answer was multipronged, but rested in co-presenter Paul Lander's succinct response.



Paul Lander

"The opportunity here is to be a resource for water quality managers and sustainability professionals," said Lander, Ph.d, ASLA, LEED AP, a consultant with Dakota Ridge Partners in Boulder, Colo. "In almost every city across the nation, they're going to have a whole suite of things on their plates. If there's an opportunity for (irrigation professionals) to be seen as a resource, the profession's going to go a lot further, and we'll get more resources coming our way to help with this green infrastructure movement."

MORE ON GREEN INFRASTRUCTURE

At the scale of a city or county, green infrastructure refers to the patchwork of natural areas that provide habitat, flood protection, cleaner air and cleaner water for the community, Farner said. At the scale of a neighborhood or site, green infrastructure refers to stormwater management systems that mimic nature by soaking up and storing water.

Many states and municipalities (Philadelphia and Nashville, Tenn., to name a few) are exploring and adopting more holistic approaches to watershed management and stormwater control, including nontraditional green infrastructure approaches, such as vegetated swales, rain gardens, porous concrete and rain barrel installations. In addition to stormwater management benefits, officials are hoping to reap other green infrastructure perks like the enhanced livability and improved air quality that come from adding trees and vegetation to the urban environment, thus reducing urban temperatures and carbon dioxide in the ecosystem, Farner said.

WHAT ABOUT DROUGHT?

Drought is no doubt a primary concern in many pockets of the country, Farner said.

"You have to think about how drought affects green infrastructure," he said. "If a municipality is using plant material to

promote green infrastructure, that plant material needs to be living. If it's dead, that can have the same effect as concrete."

So the question becomes, can the plant material officials are investing in for their green infrastructure projects sustain itself, especially under the threat of drought? That's not likely the case in all regions. If members of the irrigation industry have a seat at the table in green infrastructure discussions, there's a better chance irrigation will be considered a solution, Farner and Lander said.

SERVING AS A RESOURCE

Unfortunately, landscape overwatering is commonplace, Lander said. And it's the bane of water quality managers—officials at the local, state and federal levels whose jobs are to ensure compliance with regula-

tions to minimize ill effects on water sources.

In some areas of the country, violating storm-water regulations is serious business with language like "water used for irrigation purposes shall not be allowed to run off of a site" and several hundred dollar fines.

"Increasingly, nonpoint source pollution, like irrigation runoff, is coming under scrutiny by these folks, as they move to reduce the impacts of urban development," Lander said.

Landscape and irrigation professionals who aren't familiar with nonpoint source pollution are behind the times—and missing out on a big opportunity to



One area at the U.S. Botanic Garden in Washington D.C. demonstrates "rainscaping."

partner with water quality managers and officials in pursuit of green

infrastructure projects, he said.

"It's all the little things around us that in aggregate can have a big impact," Lander said. "It's about identifying what's helpful for us so we can work with the other people who can help us to control it."


Again, Lander stated the onus is on the professional irrigation community to step up and participate. Why? "Cities need green infrastructure and green infrastructure will need smart irrigation," he said.

The Ticker:

IRRIGATION

Controller manufacturer **Galcon** acquired **Cyber Rain**, makers of WaterSense-certified controllers. Cyber Rain will become part of Galcon USA and it will continue to market products under the Cyber Rain brand.

The **Irrigation Association (IA)** created a resource page on its website for the California drought, which the state's Gov. Jerry Brown declared an emergency in January. This page links to drought resources and details the IA's activity in the face of the drought. The association plans to update the page regularly. Visit irrigation.org/2014_California_Drought/ for more information.

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Testing a new strategy

How one lawn care company formed an R&D business unit to improve customer retention.

By JONATHAN KATZ

Joshua Anderson's residential lawn care business, Team Green Lawn, grew almost as fast as his customers' turf. Anderson started the business in 2004 with about 30 accounts. By 2008, the Xenia, Ohio-based company had 800 clients. But the fast-paced growth came at a price. The company's service levels declined and customer retention suffered as a result.

"There was no longer that personal touch and connection with the customers," Anderson recalls.

In 2012, he decided to explore a different approach to serving customers. He formed a separate business unit called Turfway Lawns that would serve

primarily as a research and development (R&D) arm. The R&D business allows Anderson to try new strategies, products and services without risking the reputation of his primary business.

At Turfway Lawns, to control for variances only production managers were allowed to perform lawn applications rather than technicians. Anderson wanted to measure the impact of a more personalized approach to servicing clients.

"They were to handle all aspects of customer service and retention like they owned the accounts," Anderson says. "I wanted them to know every customer personally and be on a first-name basis."

The results were noticeably stronger.

Within six months of forming Turfway Lawns, the company established 1,200 accounts and had a 15 percent higher customer-retention rate than Team Green Lawn. In addition, Anderson says morale across both companies rose along with and referral rates.

He attributes the success to providing more personalized service, similar to how he handled accounts when Team Green Lawn was much smaller.

KNOW YOUR CUSTOMER

When the company had a few dozen accounts, Anderson knew his customers

Daughter of Team Green Lawn's owner Josh Anderson goes on a turf-seed run with her dad.



Team Green Lawn and Turfway Lawns door-to-door marketing staff members pose for a photo during a summer picnic.

PHOTOS: TEAM GREEN LAWN

by name, answered all their calls and attended to their needs individually.

That became impossible when the company's customer list grew into the thousands. By 2009-2010, Team Green Lawn struggled to retain existing customers. Additionally, technicians were responding to calls outside their designated zones. This further strained relationships with customers because the technicians were not familiar with some clients' properties.

Despite growing the customer base to 10,000-plus properties and annual revenue approaching \$3.6 million, Anderson became discouraged.

"Problems were on the rise, and technicians were merging into neighboring zones, causing conflict with customers due to communication and

routing issues," he says. "Consistency of effort and morale wavered."

Anderson wanted to regain the customer loyalty he experienced in the early years. He wanted to see if experienced managers made a difference in annual retention outcome by building personal relationships with customers.

He initially invested approximately \$150,000 to set up offices, purchase equipment and hire sales representatives to sell the Turfway accounts. He gave two Team Green Lawn managers the responsibility of juggling Turfway accounts along with their Team Green Lawn obligations. Balancing the two jobs was difficult for the managers in the beginning, but they received additional pay from the new company, Anderson says.

Anderson provided cash bonuses to managers who met retention goals. Their goal was to record less than three full lawn-application program cancels per week or less than 20 full-program cancels per application round. The managers also were expected to develop a rapport with their clients. Anderson asked them to be a little less formal and address the clients by their first name.

"They were using the ownership-thinking mentality just like I used as a new lawn care guy who had a connection with his customers," Anderson says.

He regularly rode along with the managers to see how they were interacting with customers. He also defined specific route zones so only the person assigned to a particular service area was responding to calls in that ZIP code.

The Ticker:

LAWN CARE

The M&A market has seen some bustle lately. **SavATree** merged with **Country Green** and **St. Croix Tree Service**; **Noon Turf Care** bought **Grasshopper Lawns**; **Ryan Lawn & Tree** merged with **Simply Green Lawn Sprinklers**; and **Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care** acquired **Advanced Tree and Lawn Concepts** and **Nitro-Green Lawn and Tree Care**.

Nufarm introduced its new Last Call herbicide and Anuew turf growth regulator, both usable on cool-season turf. Anuew also may be applied to warm-season turf.

Bayer CropScience donated \$19.3 million to Texas Tech University to benefit research developments in the Department of Planet and Soil Sciences. Bayer's total contributions to the university since 1998 equal \$276 million.



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Having an R&D company also balanced the risks of trying new products, Anderson says.

"If I try a new herbicide or fertilizer from a manufacturer I've never used before, instead of risking my entire customer base or reputation in a certain area from bad results with the use of a certain product for TGL, I could take all that risk and apply it to a smaller business like Turfway Lawns," he says.

THE RESULTS

Anderson already has applied some lessons learned at Turfway to Team Green Lawn.



For example, technicians at Team Green Lawn only are allowed to perform applications at properties in a designated ZIP code unless they have permission from management. This ensures customers are receiving consistent care from a single technician.

Anderson is still in the process of comparing retention rates between the two companies. The next step is to measure how well Team Green Lawn and



John Anderson (above, right), hands out cash bonuses at the annual banquet.

Turfway can retain "saved" customers, defined as Team Green Lawn clients who canceled and then returned.

Anderson plans to keep the Turfway business operating until he decides he has enough information to implement necessary changes at Team Green Lawn or the business becomes too much of an expense burden. **LM**

Katz is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.

PHOTOS: TEAM GREEN LAWN

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UTILITY VEHICLES:

Create efficiencies, improve productivity

Utility vehicles have historically proven to be a great tool to transport people and haul cargo, but recent advances in technology have equipped utility vehicles to be a true partner on the jobsite.

By integrating the right utility vehicle into their current fleet, landscape professionals have the opportunity to create equipment and budget efficiencies while improving overall productivity.

Equipment and budget efficiencies

While most utility vehicles can support accessories and attachments, very few have the capability of operating a complete line of integrated commercial attachments through a front-end, power take-off (PTO) system.

"It's important for a company to evaluate its current fleet of vehicles to see how a utility vehicle with an advanced attachment system will fit in," says Aaron Stegemann, Polaris business development manager. "They may be surprised that choosing a utility vehicle with attachments can actually eliminate the need for multiple vehicles."

In addition to hauling up to 1,250 pounds in its rear pallet-sized cargo box and towing up to one ton, the Polaris BRUTUS HDPTO makes it possible for landscape professionals to execute additional applications.

Three PTO-powered front attachments—a 70-inch angle broom, a snow blower with a 62-inch cutting width and a 66-inch cutting width finishing

mower—are driven directly from the vehicle's 24-horsepower diesel engine.

The BRUTUS HDPTO also operates three hydraulically-powered front attachments—a 69-inch snow blade, 450-pound capacity adjustable width pallet forks and a 62-inch materials bucket with 500-pound capacity—that also can be used on the BRUTUS HD model.

"Using one vehicle to operate multiple implements will lead to budget efficiencies during the life of the equipment," Stegemann says. "By adding a utility vehicle that can replace multiple machines in its fleet, a company will have less equipment to service and maintain."

Improved productivity

Getting the most from equipment and workers is a top priority for all landscape companies.

The utility vehicle's ability to operate multiple attachments will increase productivity, but it's important for the vehicle to be equipped with an easy-to-use attachment system.

Stegemann suggests landscape professionals look for a vehicle that features an attachment system for easy and quick connection and disconnection of all supported attachments.

In-cab, ergonomic operator controls also are key for increasing a fleet's productivity. The newest commercial utility vehicles will feature an intuitive joystick and independent throttle control that's consistent with other work machines landscape professionals are accustomed to using.

Another feature that can greatly impact an operator's productivity is their comfort. "It's no secret we will be more productive if we're content with our surroundings," Stegemann says. "A fully-enclosed, factory-



Ergonomic operator controls

installed cab with heat, air conditioning and defrost will keep the operator comfortable no matter what the conditions are outside."

When dealing with a variety of terrains, operators can find themselves frequently changing drive settings. On-Demand True All-Wheel Drive will keep the vehicle moving, so the operator doesn't have to worry about switching settings. The system automatically engages all four wheels when more forward traction is necessary and then reverts back to two-wheel drive. Additionally, the VersaTrac Turf Mode switch allows operators to unlock the rear differential for easier, tighter turns without tearing up the turf.

The vehicle's pedal impacts productivity as well. Landscape applications such as snow removal and mowing demand frequent back-and-forth motion, and a treadle pedal can significantly simplify travel operation. The shiftless forward and reverse travel means operators never have to remove their hands from the wheel.

"For landscape professionals, a utility vehicle may seem like a small piece of their overall operation," Stegemann says. "I urge those in the purchasing roles to look at how a utility vehicle with a PTO attachment system can further create efficiencies and boost worker productivity."



Treadle pedal

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BLOW



SWEEP

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PROFITING FROM DESIGN

JODY SHILAN

Shilan is editor of FromDesign2Build.com. Contact him at 201/783-2844 or jshilan@gmail.com.

When do you disclose design fees?

Q Do you tell clients on the initial phone call that you charge a design fee for your drawings or do you wait until you meet with them?

A My short answer is yes and no. How's that for hedging?

When a client initially calls I use a screening process to determine if he or she is a good fit for me and my company. In other words, I don't just get the name, address and phone number and set up an appointment without doing my due diligence. This means I need to find out what the word "landscape" means to the person before I decide if it makes sense to meet. As many of you know "landscape" means many different things. That's why it's so important to screen customers and find out what their definitions are. Do they want landscape maintenance or landscape construction; hardscaping or plantings; lawn care or a complete property overhaul?

If the caller meets my criteria and sounds like he or she is a solid design/build prospect I'll set up an appointment at his or her home. I have no desire to discuss design fees on the phone because my goal is to have a face-to-face meeting. Prematurely discussing design fees allows the caller to say "thanks but no thanks."

I believe we should provide qualified clients with complimentary one-hour meetings at their homes with no strings attached. This meeting is your opportunity to show them who you are, what you can do for them and why they should work with you instead of your competitors. Regardless of how much money you've spent on marketing and advertising to create a company image, there's still nothing like an in-person meeting. If done correctly, these meeting will give the homeowners the confidence and assurances to decide your company is the right fit for them.

Therefore, if you discuss design fees on the phone or use them as a qualifier, you're going to lose the opportunity to get in front of many good clients. There are two reasons for this. First, since your prospects

have very little time invested in you it's easy for them to hang up once they hear "design fee," especially when many companies are telling them their designs are free. Secondly, landscape plans come in all shapes and sizes—from notepad sketches to computer generated, color-rendered master plans. If you can't set a meeting to show them the type of quality plans you provide, they'll assume a plan is a plan is a plan and you'll be just the same as everyone else. On the other hand, if you do meet with them, you can show them a sample drawing from another project to help them understand why they need a design and why there's a cost associated with it—unless you're the notepad-design guy. Then you're on your own.

OK, this all sounds great, but what if a customer directly asks you on the phone if you charge a design fee? Worry not. Here's a little trade secret to help you with those prequalified customers who ask about design fees as their way of qualifying you, possibly deciding right then and there they don't want to meet. Honesty is still your best policy, but there's nothing wrong with spinning your response a little bit.

When a prospect asks simply say, "Yes, there is, but there's no cost for me to come out and meet with you to discuss your project." What you've done is taken away the fear of being obligated to hire you at that first meeting. If you want to pour it on a little thicker, explain the reason there's no charge for the initial consultation is it's important customers feel comfortable with whomever they decide to work with, whether it's you or another company.

Finally, I give you the "yes" explanation to your question. Always discuss design fees with unqualified customers who are not a good fit for your company. If you just know a caller is going to be a complete waste of your time, this is where you use the design fee as a way to essentially scare them off as opposed to telling them they don't have enough money. In the sales world we just say they've been "successfully eliminated."

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

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Learning to (yard)walk



WHEN TALKING ABOUT horticulture, Tom Strangfeld is a natural at addressing crowds. The independent landscape designer and horticulturist has lectured at Boston's Arnold Arboretum and appeared on "This Old House," to pick a few bullet points from his resume. But a few years ago he got the urge to teach in a more intimate setting to give people more individual attention. He's been conducting "yardwalks" ever since.

Dubbed by his wife as yardwalking, Strangfeld describes the service as "private horticultural instruction" with homeowners in their yards. Homeowners choose from one of three topics—planning, pruning or planting—and, at a price tag of \$95 per hour, Strangfeld walks the property with them, teaching how to properly care for their landscape. The service offers homeowners his 40 years of experience in one, concise meeting that's directly tailored to their needs.

Strangfeld estimates he's performed about a hundred yardwalks, although he essentially has been doing it as an initial design consultant for most of his career.

He notes some key differences between yardwalking and an initiation site meeting. The biggest one is yardwalking is not a service meant to lead to a sale. It's completely focused on education, providing the homeowners with the information to oversee their own properties.

"You cannot go into this looking to sell a job because that's not what it's about," Strangfeld says. "You need to focus on the client and what they need. They'll be able to tell if you're turning it into a sales pitch and then they'll wonder why they're paying for it."

While this sometimes means sacrificing "trade secrets," Strangfeld says that's OK because, essentially, that's what the homeowner is paying for versus someone else doing the work. To that end, ideal yardwalk clients are "do-it-yourselfers," he says. Thus, it's a bonus if those homeowners do turn into design

clients—and 10 percent to 20 percent of them eventually do, Strangfeld says.

"I think the fact that I go there as a teacher and not a salesman actually helps me get more jobs," he says. "And if I don't, I'm fine with that because it wasn't why I was there."

Strangfeld markets the service mostly through his speaking engagements at garden clubs and on his website, but this year he's considering targeting a few communities with a direct mail program or local newspaper advertising. Last fall, he caught quite a bit of business after an article ran in *The Boston Globe* about yardwalking. Several months thereafter he was doing five to eight yardwalks per week.

>> SERVICE SNAPSHOT

PROFESSIONAL: Tom Strangfeld

LOCATION: Wayland, Mass.

SERVICE: Yardwalking

WHY: To share horticultural knowledge with homeowners to help them improve their landscapes independently.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE: Marketing. While Strangfeld has gotten the word out through teaching and an article last year in *The Boston Globe*, he has time for more clientele. "I can't drive by a home without wondering how I could help them," Strangfeld says.

BEST TIP: It's not just about talking. "I spend a lot of time listening to what the client has to say," Strangfeld says. "Then I repeat what they said back to them to make sure I understood it correctly (and so) they know I'm listening."

WHAT IT TAKES

Although offering yardwalking has a low barrier to entry, with no new equipment required, Strangfeld says it's not a fitting add-on for every landscape professional because clients are paying for knowledge. With Strangfeld, for instance, they're paying for his four decades of experience, plus his knack for teaching.

"You need to have the ability to talk to people," he says. "It's like being able to hold an ongoing conversation at a cocktail party. You also need to have a fairly even temper and be an overall pleasant person. You have to be fully engaged."

It also requires the ability to understand a landscape within minutes of getting on the property, Strangfeld says.

"I'm coming onto a property and have no previous knowledge of what's there or what I'll see," he says. "One of my favorite things about the business has always been my ability to be dropped into a landscape from outer space and understand it right away. That's a necessary skill for yardwalking."

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

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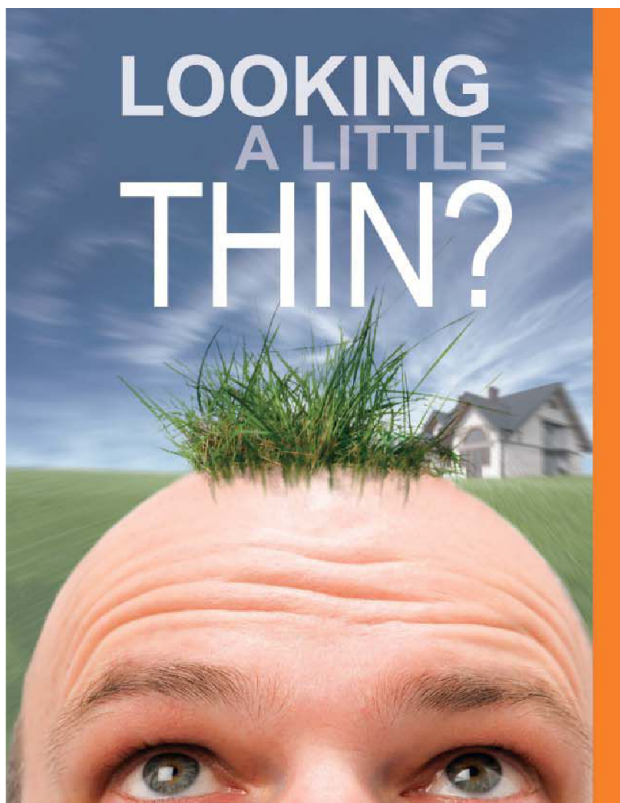
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MOWERS



QuikTrak M series

The new QuikTrak M series of stand-on, zero-turn mowers—the 636M, 648M and 652M—offer a lightweight, compact footprint for easy maneuverability. The series is available with 36-, 48- or 52-in. (pictured), 7-gauge fabricated floating steel decks. In addition to flat-free front tires and sealed front caster bearings, the mowers offer a quick height of cut adjustment and a two-year, unlimited hour commercial warranty.

John Deere // JohnDeere.com/MowPro



Mower attachment

The Bobcat front-mounted mower attachment cuts grass before it's driven over, allowing improved working visibility of the area to be mowed. The frame design allows the mower to oscillate independently to follow uneven terrain. It's available in 71.5- and 89.5-in. cutting widths to mow everything from roadside ditches to large acreages.

Bobcat Co. // Bobcat.com/attachments/mower



Stander ZK

The Stander ZK has deck widths of 52 and 61 in. and engines up to 31 hp. Decks are deeper; wheels are larger; fuel capacity is greater than the traditional Stander, and the ZK can mow at speeds up to 13.5 mph. It's also equipped with Wright's Rapid Height Adjustment, which lets the operator raise or lower the cutting height without getting off the mower.

Wright Manufacturing // WrightMfg.com



Propane Mower Incentive Program

PERC continues its Propane Mower Incentive Program in 2014. Landscape professionals can receive \$1,000 toward the purchase of qualifying propane mowers or \$500 toward eligible conversions of gasoline- or diesel-powered mowers. Data collected through the program is used for new product development.

Propane Education & Research Council // PoweredByPropane.org

Rear-mount mowers

Kioti rear-mount mowers are designed to mount to any tractor and float to follow uneven contours. Each mower is built with heavy-duty steel to meet Kioti's quality standards. Ranging from 60 in. to 84 in., the mowers offer the ability to navigate any terrain, the company says.

Kioti // Kioti.com



Altoz

With a top speed of 19 mph, the 2014 Altoz XC Z line of zero-turn mowers features the Aero Deck High Output System and Gator Mulcher G6 blades. The line, which includes the XC 720 Z (pictured), XC 610 Z and XC 540 Z models, also offers the SmarTrak Monitoring System, a digital RPM gauge, alarm protection and an on-board clock.

Altoz // Altoz.com



Lazer Z X-Series

Exmark expanded the availability of its exclusive RED on-board intelligence technology to Lazer Z X-Series models with 52-in. UltraCut Series 6 cutting decks. Sixty- and 72-in. cutting decks are also available. RED technology is designed to provide increased durability with an exclusive clutch saver feature and intelligent monitoring of vital engine parameters such as engine temperature and oil pressure.

Exmark Manufacturing // Exmark.com

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Z Master Professional 5000 series

The Toro Z Master Professional 5000 series has two new models with rear discharge decks. Featuring Toro's Turbo Force cutting deck with 7-gauge steel, cast iron spindle housings and high-strength steel blades, the mowers are available in 60- and 72-in. cutting widths. The decks are designed with two blades rotating clockwise and one blade rotating counterclockwise to spread clippings evenly through the rear discharge port.

The Toro Co. // Toro.com/professional



Tank series

Ideal for mowing properties up to 15 acres, the Tank SZ (pictured) and LZ feature an integrated 14cc Commercial Drive System that provides high operating efficiency power to the deck and durability. The mowers feature cooler run temperatures that increase transmission life, the company says. They are capable of ground speeds at 11 mph forward and 5 mph reverse.

Cub Cadet // CubCadet.com



Electronic fuel injection mowers

New Grasshopper EFI mowers feature Delphi-based, closed-loop engines that monitor internal and external factors and make automatic adjustments to maintain an optimum fuel ratio. Automotive-style plug-in diagnostics facilitate faster and more precise service. Models 327 EFI and 727T EFI accept side-discharge cutting decks up to 72 in. as well as dedicated rear discharge decks and PowerVac Collection Systems.

The Grasshopper Co. // GrasshopperMower.com



Pro-Turn 400

Gravely introduces Kawasaki big block engine options to the Pro-Turn 400 zero-turn mower lineup. The mowers also feature the industry's first air-suspension seat and a new effortless deck lift, the company says. A rubber isolated foot platform minimizes vibration for a more comfortable ride. Each gas and diesel mower has a 13.4-gal. fuel capacity.

Gravely // Gravely.com

IRRIGATION CONTROLLERS



WeatherTRAK Budget Manager

The new WeatherTRAK Budget Manager uses a real-time, online dashboard to track actual or estimated water use against budget, analyze trends and share budget-related reports with property and operations teams to quickly identify site issues between water bill cycles. It also can be used to assess the conservation potential for additional landscape investment projects, such as high-efficiency nozzles.

HydroPoint Data Systems // HydroPoint.com



Evolution

Toro's new Evolution controller features shortcut buttons with quick access to basic functions, while the advanced menu is shown on a graphics display that navigates similar to many modern consumer electronic devices. Use a standard USB drive to transfer programming to one or more controllers quickly and easily. The USB drive also provides controller logging functionality to save an operation log for diagnostic purposes.

The Toro Co. // ToroEvolution.com



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McCrometer // McCrometer.com

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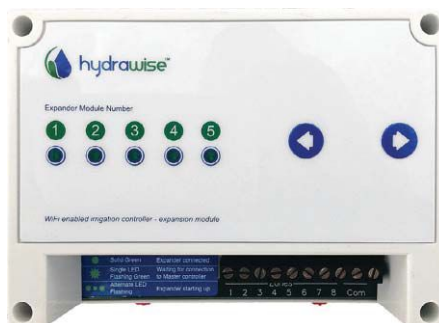
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Rain Bird // RainBird.com



8 Zone Expansion Module

Hydrawise's new 8 Zone Expansion Module takes a single controller's capacity to 16 zones. It plugs into the connector on the side of an existing controller and allows the expansion module to be placed in a different location to the main controller. All second-generation Hydrawise controllers (sold since March 2013) support the new module. A future upgrade is under development to allow up to 48 zones, the company says.

Hydrawise // Hydrawise.com

I-Core 3.0

The new version of the I-Core irrigation controller features a Solar Sync dial position and allows all sensor setup functions from the main control panel. The controller also permits a Solar Sync Delay feature, allowing the installer to specify a number of days before the controller switches to automatic adjustment mode.

Hunter Industries // HunterIndustries.com



HARDSCAPE SUPPLIES

StormPave

While it looks almost exactly like Pine Hall's classic English Edge paver that's been installed for decades across the U.S., StormPave is a different: It's permeable. Rainwater goes in between the pavers and is held in a bed of aggregates underneath until it's absorbed into the ground.

Pine Hall Brick Co. // PineHallBrick.com



Borealis

Techo-Bloc offers the Borealis wood plank concrete slab. The new modular 5-in.-wide slabs are available in Sauvignon Oak, Hazelnut Brandy and Smoked Pine.

Techo-Bloc // Techo-Bloc.com



BT60, BT65 and BVT65

BOMAG's new line of vibratory tampers includes the BT60, BT65 and BVT65. The tampers combine low operating weights with compaction performance to optimize productivity and ease of operation in applications such as trench construction and landscaping, among others. These models range in weight from 128 pounds to 150 pounds and in impact force from 3,372 pounds to 3,822. Each model is powered by a 4-cycle Honda engine with recoil starter.

BOMAG // Bomag.com



Mega-Tandem Mass Segmental Retaining Wall

The Mega-Tandem MSRW system provides the natural appearance of chiseled stone and can be used to create curved or straight retaining and freestanding landscape walls. Available in 12-in.-by-24-in. panels weighing 65 lbs. apiece, the system has a running bond configuration so no patterns are required. It's offered in three color blends and 12 different facial textures.

Belgard Hardscapes // BelgardCommercial.com



Bradco Hardscape Grapple

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Paladin Attachments // PaladinAttachments.com

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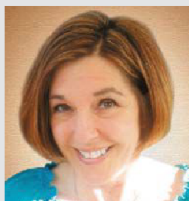
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[Coming in June]

LM150 deadline extended

Entries for the LM150 list has been extended until April 1.

Don't miss your chance to be listed among the Green Industry's largest companies, ranked by annual revenue. The results will be published in the June 2014 issue of *Landscape Management*. Enter at ow.ly/tjR5E or contact Editor Marisa Palmieri at mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net or 216-706-3764 for more information.



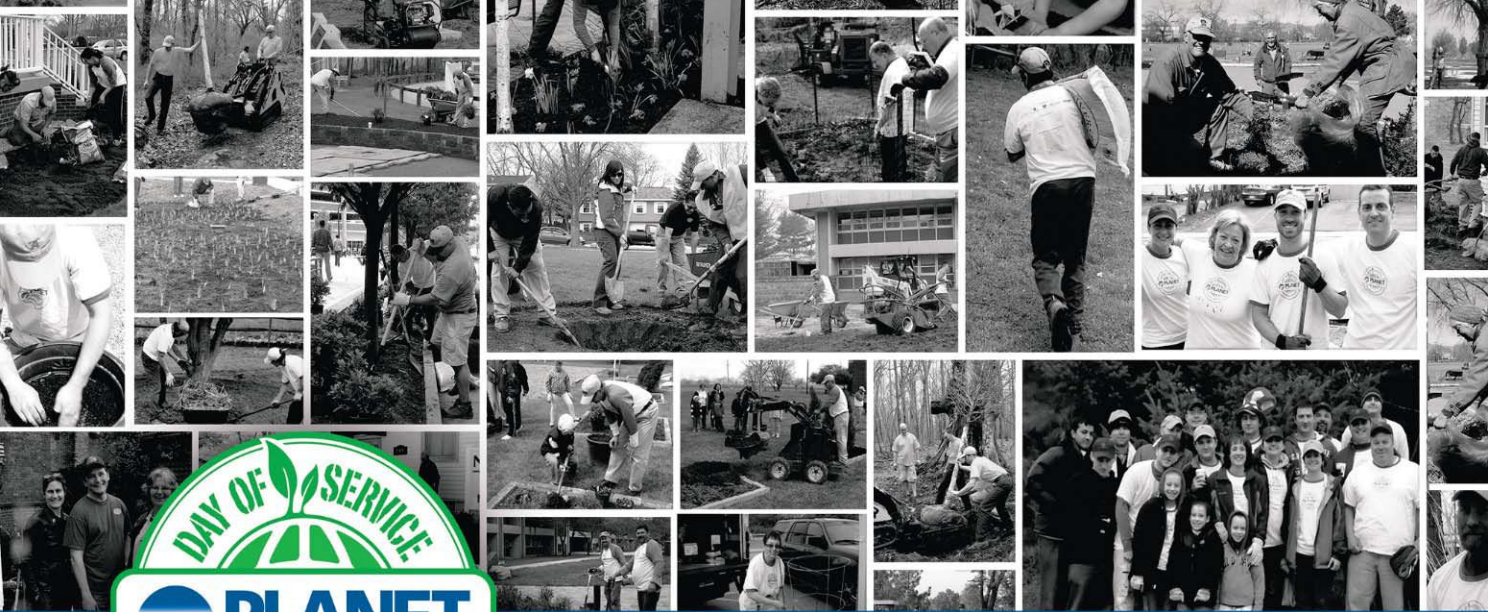
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Gary LaScalea,

president of GroGreen, Plano, Texas



Who's your mentor? I've been in the industry for 40-some years, so I've had several. Bob Maddux, he's one of the guys that inspired me back in my early days when I worked at a garden center (Delhi Flower & Garden Centers) in Cincinnati, Ohio. He was the guy that worked you very hard, but you respected and learned from that. Thomas Smith was another. He was one of my professors at University of Cincinnati. I worked under him at Spring Grove Cemetery in kind of an internship.

My wife, Sallie, also has been a real mentor. It's that marriage team. Your spouse has to get you inspired when you get out of work or in those times you're frustrated.

Without my wife, I probably wouldn't be successful.

Your business has a pest control component. Any tips for business owners considering implementing that service? We always look at how we use that word "pest control." It's more pest prevention, looking at issues on the outside to see what homeowners can do to prevent them from coming inside. It's a better integrated pest management outlook that requires a lot of perimeter treatments to prevent inside invasions. There was a time when everyone went inside the home and treated all the baseboards, but now you have environmentally conscious people. You always want to look at what that need is.

What in the industry has changed most over your "40-some years" in lawn care? The workforce has changed quite a bit. For one, you don't put an ad in the paper anymore. It's all about networking and having an eye open to try to recruit somebody. In terms of work ethic, people get educated now and I don't think their first focus is to work outside. They like to work behind the computer. You have to make sure they see an opportunity (in the Green Industry) for growth and advancement.

I'd say regulatory issues, too, just in general. The labor board, ordinances and laws about what you can and cannot do sometimes make it hard on a business. You spend a lot of time on those interruptions and there are costs associated.

How do you strike a work/life balance? In our industry it's hard to plan things for your personal life. You have to take advantage of when time opens up for you to do something you enjoy. Do it in the moment. Sallie and I will take a weekend to head to our place in Sarasota, Fla., and we go to Dallas Mavericks games. We've been going to those for, gosh, maybe eight years. Now we have floor seats.

What's the most satisfying part of your job? It's that moment when you go on the lawn, see how good it looks and know you contributed to that beauty. Related to that is when I'm at church or shopping and someone recognizes me for my service because they're my customer. It makes you feel good because you know you've built a reputation. When you try to be a part of the community, people know who you are. Everything in life is about relationships.

OFF THE CLOCK

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DO YOU OFTEN GET UP IN THE CLOUDS? I'm an old fly boy. I was an avid pilot through my 20s and 30s but not through my 40s and 50s. It all was recreational. I still wear my little pilot wings on my sports coat.

WHAT'S THE BEST PART ABOUT LIVING IN TEXAS? Because of all the sunshine, you're always a little happier. Plus, people have that southern hospitality. You can have conversations in the bathroom.

You know, I could tell you about my favorite band. **OK, WHAT IS IT?** Chicago. I've been following them since high school. I'm in the fan club. I go to their concerts every year. I bet I've seen them in concert 50-plus times. That's a conservative estimate.



HAVE YOU MET ANY BAND MEMBERS? Yeah, we've been in the same clubs and I follow them around. I've talked to them.

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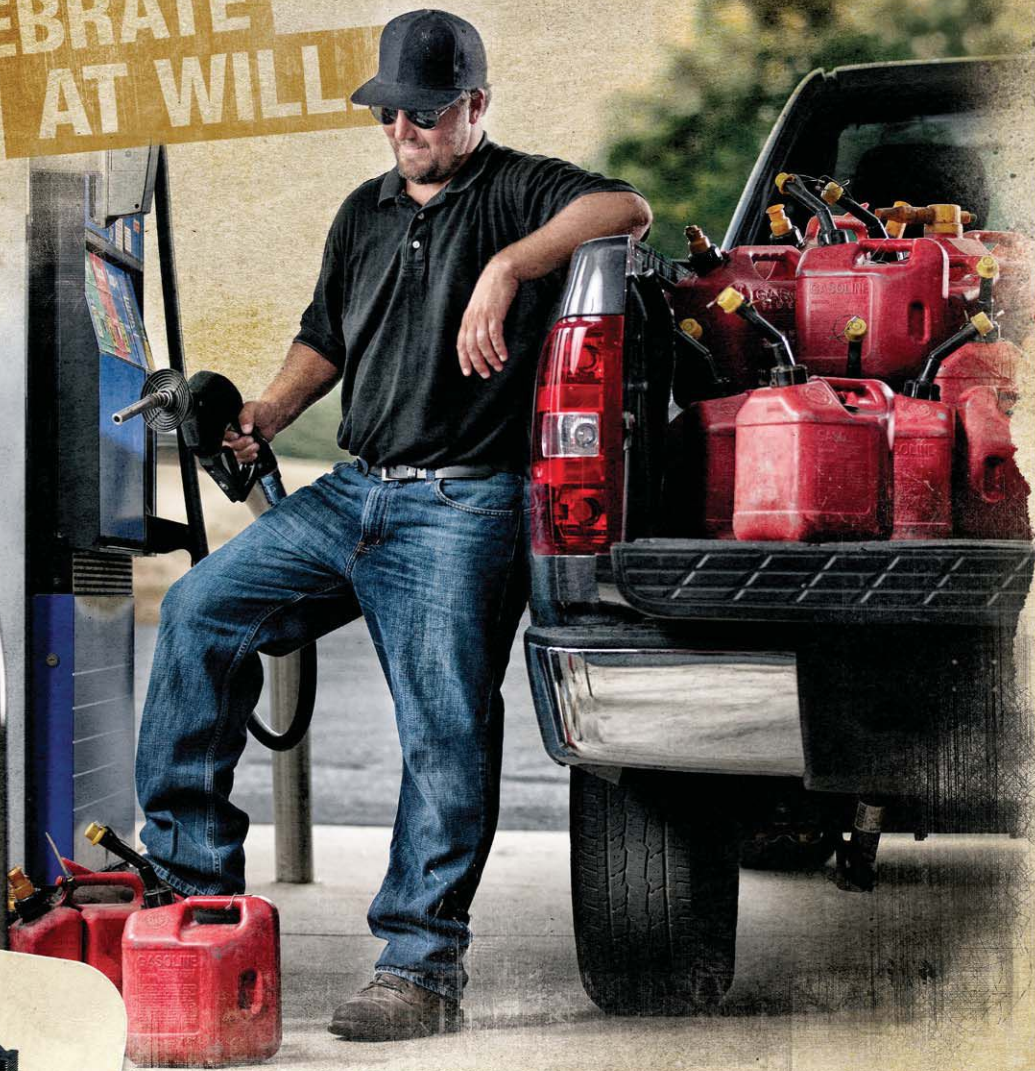
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