



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

YOU HAVE YOUR PILOT'S LICENSE.

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.