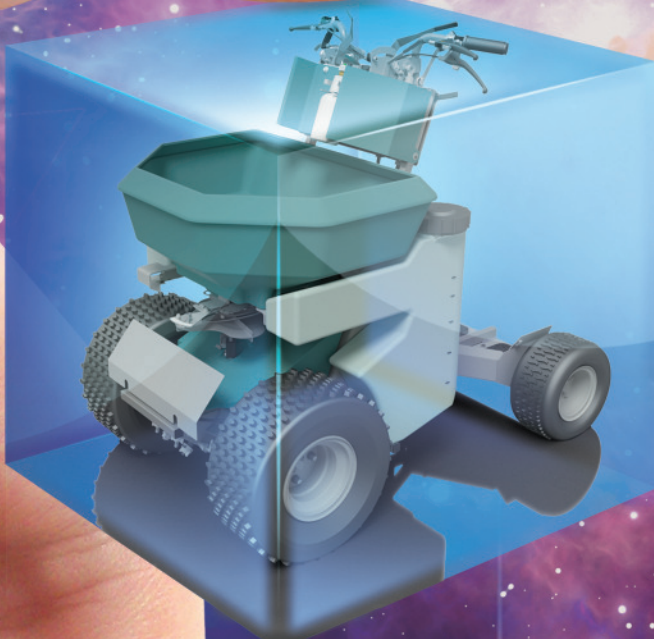


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**Zika virus
strategies**

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tree service**

**Are you on
Instagram?**

Eric Remeis
(right),
president of
Yard Solutions
near Columbus,
Ohio, and one
of his mentors,
Elliott Tobias.

WHO'S YOUR MENTOR?

Landscape
pros and their
mentors prove
the value of these
relationships.

July 2016 VOL 55, ISSUE 7
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BY MARISA PALMIERI

ON THE COVER: PHOTO BY JERRY MANN, JERRYMAN.COM

The first thing it spreads is the distance between you and your nearest competitor.

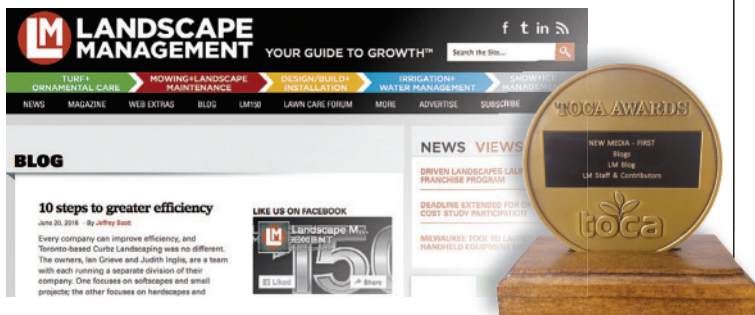


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CHECK OUT THE AWARD-WINNING LM BLOG



➔ Can't get enough of LM? The print edition only scratches the surface of what Your Guide to Growth has to offer. Dig deeper with the LM Blog, named best in New Media Publishing by the Turf & Ornamental Communicators Association (TOCA). Regular post from consultants like Jeffrey Scott and Phil Harwood keep readers up to date on trends and best practices, and guest posts from other industry members offer fresh ideas to adopt. To get started, read public affairs blogger Gregg Robertson's piece on the importance of reviewing job classifications before implementing the Department of Labor's new overtime rule at LandscapeManagement.net/blog.

APP PICK

Doodle Save yourself the hassle of exchanging meeting-related emails with Doodle, a free event coordinator and calendar. Its features allow you to check the dates and times that your colleagues or clients are available. Once you find the best time slot for everyone, the app sends an email confirming the meeting to those who plan to attend. **Free • iOS, Android** —Dana Shugrue



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EDITOR'S NOTE

MARISA PALMIERI
EDITOR

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



A no-brainer

"Get a mentor" seems like a no-brainer piece of advice, right? Apparently it's not. As I explain in this month's cover story, research shows only 8 percent of small business owners say they have a mentor.

I suppose the number is so low due to the age-old problem of small business people, landscape professionals included, working *in* their business instead of *on* their business.

Plus, entrepreneurs typically have an independent streak. The kind of person who's going to forge his own path may not be one to pull over and ask for directions. But what if doing so could get you to your destination a little faster?

In the landscape industry, there's little excuse not to have a mentor or a group of supporters you can turn to.

“The kind of person who's going to forge his own path may not be one to pull over and ask for directions.”

Becky Garber, director of membership for the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado said it best when I interviewed her about the organization's Peer-to-Peer Program, which serves as a sort of matchmaker for mentees and mentors.

"I've been involved in other industries and other associations," she says. "One of the things I find remarkable about the landscape industry is that while companies are sometimes competitors, there's still an underlying openness that I don't think typifies other industries.


That's why we can always find a mentor. It's not a hard sell."

Scott Burk, owner of Scott's Landscaping in Centre Hall, Pa., expresses a similar sentiment. He has mentored many young landscape pros he's met teaching courses at both Penn State and Penn College of Technology.

"This industry is so welcoming," Burk says. "Most contractors are willing to help out. It may not be the competition you're bidding against, but you can find somebody to help outside your area."

Without a mentor (or a few of them), he points out, many companies could be out of business before they understand how to be both a good landscaper and a good business person.

Those seeking a mentor should look outside the industry, too. It's 2016, so of course there are online options. Micro-Mentor is one of many to check out.

There are also many community resources. You may find a mentor within the local chamber of commerce—and don't ignore nonprofit groups designed to help business owners, like SCORE Association, previously known as the Service Corps of Retired Executives, or small business development centers. The latter are hosted by universities, colleges and state economic development agencies, and they're funded in part by Congress through a partnership with the U.S. Small Business Administration. There are nearly a thousand service centers that provide no-cost business consulting and low-cost training. If you need some help, it's another no-brainer. 



HEADQUARTERS

1360 East 9th St., Suite 1070,
Cleveland, OH 44114

EDITORIAL STAFF

Editor Marisa Palmieri

216/706-3764 | mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net

Associate Editor Dillon Stewart

216/706-3756 | dstewart@northcoastmedia.net

Art Director Tracie Martinez

216/280-6127 | tmartinez@northcoastmedia.net

Graphic Designer Courtney Townsend

216/363-7931 | ctownsend@northcoastmedia.net

Digital Media Content Producer Kelly Limpert

216/363-7933 | klimpert@northcoastmedia.net

ADVERTISING STAFF

Publisher Bill Roddy

216/706-3758 | broddy@northcoastmedia.net

Associate Publisher Craig MacGregor

216/706-3787 | cmacgregor@northcoastmedia.net

Account Manager Jake Goodman

216/363-7923 | jgoodman@northcoastmedia.net

Classified Accounts Manager Chloe Scoular

216/363-7929 | cscoular@northcoastmedia.net

BUSINESS STAFF

Vice President, Sales Patrick Roberts

216/706-3736 | proberts@northcoastmedia.net

Administrative Coordinator Petra Turko

216/706-3768 | pturko@northcoastmedia.net

Manager, Meetings and Events Ryan Bockmuller

216/706-3772 | rbockmuller@northcoastmedia.net

Marketing Manager Scott Gebler

216/363-7932 | sgebler@northcoastmedia.net

Manager, Production Services Terri Johnstone

216/978-9622 | tjohnstone@northcoastmedia.net

Senior Audience Development Manager

Antoinette Sanchez-Perkins

216/706-3750 | asanchez-perkins@northcoastmedia.net

Digital Operations Manager Bethany Chambers

216/706-3771 | bchambers@northcoastmedia.net

Web Developer Jesse Malmacher

216/363-7925 | jmalcmacher@northcoastmedia.net

MARKETING/MAGAZINE SERVICES

Reprints & Permissions Brett Petillo

877/652-5295 | bpetillo@wrightsmedia.com

Circulation List Rental Antoinette Sanchez-Perkins

216/706-3750 | asanchez-perkins@northcoastmedia.net

Subscriber, Customer Service 847/763-4942

For current single copy or back issues



CORPORATE OFFICERS

President & CEO Kevin Stoltman

216/706-3740 | kstoltman@northcoastmedia.net

VP, Finance & Operations Steve Galperin

216/706-3705 | sgalperin@northcoastmedia.net

VP, Graphic Design & Production Pete Seltzer

216/706-3737 | pseltzer@northcoastmedia.net

Editorial Directors Marty Whitford & Marisa Palmieri

216/706-3766 | mwhitford@northcoastmedia.net

216/706-3764 | mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD

Q+A

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"My wife."

Landscape Professionals

Richard Bare
Arbor-Nomics Turf
Norcross, Ga.

Bill Bemus
Bemus Landscape
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"Bill Locklin of
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was mine until he
passed away. Bill
Schneidewind,
my CPA of 30
years, is now."

"Never
really had one—
to my great
regret. Things
may have been
easier."

"My father,
Joseph Scott
Jr., was my
biggest
mentor."

"Dr. Emol Fails—
teacher, father,
best friend.
Professionally,
I owe him
everything."

"Life!"

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BIG PICTURE

ROCK STEADY

LOCATION Essex County, N.J.

COMPANY Landscape Techniques, Nutley, N.J.

THE DETAILS A functional living space with bright color and family appeal was the goal for this backyard. The initial site visit presented a small and grade-challenged space with rock formations throughout. The team decided to tier and fill the center of the yard to minimize the slope of the adjoining property. Tiers included:

1. Lower garden;
2. Primary patio with fireplace, kitchen and pool;
3. Raised spa and patio;
4. Children's play structure with child-safe mulch; and
5. Native trees and expansive lawn areas.

The site is located atop a mountain of solid rock, so all water runs; there is no perking capability. All water—including some surface water from adjoining properties—had to be picked up and piped off-site. Although it's not visible in the finished landscape, the property required the demolition and removal of 100 tons of shot rock.

This project earned Landscape Techniques a Grand Award last year from the National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence program.

See more photos from this project at LandscapeManagement.net/BigPicture.

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RECOMMENDER

ISSUE BRIEF

STEP BY STEP

NEW STUFF

SAFETYWATCH

CLOCKING IN



Moving to mobile time sheets last year helped Integrated Landscape Management (ILM) in Tempe, Ariz., increase efficiency and go paperless.

Logging paper time sheets was a hassle for the administrative team. Plus, workers often logged hours by memory at the end of the week, leading to inaccurate time sheets and poor job estimating, owner Robert Clickenbeard says.

The upfront cost was low; ILM had to upgrade a few employees to smartphones and teach the staff how to use the app, a component of the Boss LM software ILM uses.

Now, employees clock in and clock out on the app whenever they arrive at or leave a job site. The hours are logged automatically, saving the administrative team 20-30 hours and the company up to \$1,500 in labor costs.

Communication also has improved from the app's features that allow the office to relay messages, warnings and tips to the crews. Still, the biggest benefit is accurate job costing, Clickenbeard says.

"Having more accurate data with the crews clocking in and out will determine whether our jobs are performing, whether we need to be more efficient in other ways or whether we need to propose increases to the clients," he says.

“Having accurate data will determine whether our jobs are performing.”



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RECOMMENDER

What chainsaws do you prefer and why?

A handful of manufacturers, including DeWalt, have launched cordless chainsaw models in recent years.



BRENT PAULL
CO-OWNER, TOUCH OF WILDERNESS
ANDERSON, IND.

"Husqvarna makes high-quality tools that professionals can count on. My 450 Rancher has a ton of torque but not so much I have to hold on for dear life. Also, our local big box store carries

Husqvarna. It helps being able to run in there and grab a new bar or chain and get back to the job site and not have to drive 20 miles out of the way to a dealer. The 450 Rancher is small enough for shrub and small tree removal and big enough for large trees. All of our small equipment is Husqvarna, and I don't see that changing anytime soon."



TIM DANISH
OWNER, MORGAN HILL LAND CARE
SCOTTSVILLE, N.Y.

"When it comes to everyday use, we choose Stihl chainsaws. We use an MS250 and MS170 regularly. We are purchasing an MS461 this fall for a bigger job recently sold. We know we can

rely on them day in and day out, with less downtime than other brands. A productive worker is only as good as the equipment you supply him with. I've had my share of experiences with other brands and so far, none compare to Stihl."

ISSUE >>> BRIEF



BY MISSY HENRIKSEN

The author is VP of public affairs, National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP).

NEW OSHA RULES AFFECT D/B FIRMS

Keeping up with all the federal, state and local safety regulations can be a big task. If your company does design/build work involving silica-containing concrete and stone, it's important to look at the new Occupational Safety & Health Administration (OSHA) rule.

If you drill, cut, crush or grind silica-containing materials, the new rules require controls to keep workers from breathing silica dust. OSHA issued the rule to protect workers from lung cancer, silicosis, chronic obstructive pulmonary disease and kidney disease.

The new rule reduces the permissible exposure limit (PEL) for respirable crystalline silica to 50 micrograms per cubic meter of air, averaged over an eight-hour shift. It also requires employers to use engineering controls (such as water or ventilation) to limit worker exposure to the PEL; provide respirators when engineering controls cannot adequately limit exposure; limit worker access to high-exposure areas; develop a written exposure control plan; offer medical exams to highly exposed workers; and train workers on silica risks and how to limit exposures.

OSHA says most employers can limit harmful dust exposure in practical ways, using equipment that's widely available—generally using water or a vacuum system to divert or capture dust at the source.

The final rule became effective on June 23 and companies have one year to comply with all requirements except the methods of sample analysis (they have two years for that).

Visit OSHA's website for safety information materials. 

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STEP BY STEP

Edge a landscape bed

One of the first steps to creating a new landscape bed is to establish a neat, consistent edge. Maintaining an existing edge is also an effective way to keep beds looking tidy. Some contractors prefer a power tool such as an electric edger or a trimmer to edge their landscape beds, but others agree that manually edging with a tool allows for more control. A half-moon edger is a common and efficient option, as the edger's depth guard will create an edge with a consistent depth. Sharpen the tool with a file or grinder to make the edging process easier and to make a cleaner cut.

It's helpful to mark the line you want to create with spray paint or chalk to keep the edge straight and smooth, especially when there's a large area to edge. Also remember to beware of any irrigation lines, drainage pipes, electrical wires or cables that may be buried in or around the area being edged.

Once the edge is finished, a barrier will help keep it in place. Common types of barriers include poly, metal or aluminum edging, as well as bricks, rocks, stone or wood. To prevent weeds, grass or invasive plants from entering the bed, extend the barrier at least 2 inches below the soil surface.

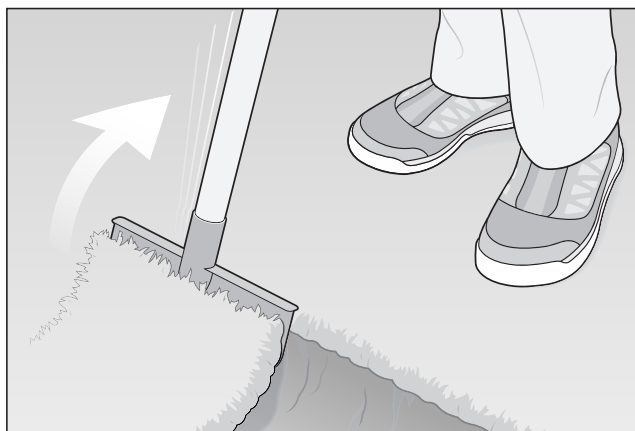
Follow these steps to properly edge a landscape bed using a half-moon edger. 

SOURCE: A.M. Leonard Horticultural Tool & Supply Co.; The Garden Continuum



STEP 1

Using an edger, slice through the sod at a 90-degree angle.



STEP 2

Using the edger, push the soil away from the freshly-cut edge, creating a trench. Continue steps one and two for the desired length of the edge.



STEP 3

Using a string trimmer, trim the grass vertically in preparation for installing a barrier to keep the edge in place.

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NEW STUFF



1



2



3

1. AP 100 LITHIUM-ION BATTERY

COMPANY: Stihl

URL: StihlUSA.com

At 1.8 lbs., this lithium-ion battery delivers the same energy content and run times as the previous model with 31 percent less battery weight. The Stihl AL 500 high-speed charger, capable of recharging the battery in as few as 35 minutes, comes standard with the battery, which produces zero exhaust emissions and reduces dependence on gas and oil, Stihl says.

2. ALUMINUM TILT UTILITY TRAILER LINE

COMPANY: Bear Track

URL: BearTrackProducts.com

Bear Track launched a new family of aluminum tilt utility trailers. The new line includes five models with carrying capacities ranging from 2,340 lbs. to 4,115 lbs. Hydraulic dampers and gas springs operate all models.

3. R350T AND R350T GENERATION 2 FORESTRY

COMPANY: Terex

URL: Terex.com

Terex's two new compact track loaders feature a 12-hp, turbo-charged EPA Tier 4 Final Cummins QSF3.8 diesel engine. The models feature 360 ft.-lbs. of peak engine torque, high-flow auxiliary hydraulics, a high-capacity cooling system and a two-speed hydro-static drive system that allows travel speeds up to 10 mph.



4



6



5

CHECK OUT MORE NEW STUFF ONLINE

To stay up to date on all the latest landscape industry products and services, visit LandscapeManagement.net/tag/product-news.

4. DS 3000 T PROFESSIONAL BRUSHCUTTER

COMPANY: Efco

URL: EfcoPower.com

This product was designed with the intensive user in mind, Efco says. It has a two-stroke engine that delivers 30 cc and 1.5 hp. Its Easy On starting system ensures smooth and quick starts, and its ergonomic bike handle reduces vibrations to increase operator comfort. The Load & Go head helps users reload line in under a minute.

5. COMPLETE MICRO IRRIGATION SYSTEM

COMPANY: Hunter Industries

URL: HunterIndustries.com

Hunter added a complete line of drip irrigation products. The lineup includes PLD-LOC fittings that fit 1/2-in. tubing between 16-18 mm, commercial-grade IH Risers (flexible PVC), multi-port emitters for commercial PVC systems, mini landscape dripline, 1/4-in. polyethylene and vinyl tubing, 1/2-in. polyethylene tubing, rigid risers, and an Eco-Indicator that shows when the drip system is functioning. Many of the system's new components are available in brown to blend into the landscape.

6. XRZ PRO WITH 48-IN. AND 61-IN. DECKS

COMPANY: Bob-Cat

URL: BobCatTurf.com

Joining the original 52-in. deck, Bob-Cat made two new deck sizes available for its XRZ Pro zero-turn mower. The 48-in. is ideal for smaller properties, while the 61-in. helps quickly mow large-acreage properties, Bob-Cat says. All three mowers are equipped with Kawasaki FX Series Professional Grade engines and 22-in. Zero-T Drive tires, which are designed to improve grip and puncture resistance.

SAFETYWATCH

HANDHELD EDGER PERSONAL PROTECTIVE EQUIPMENT

The deflector and skirt provided with your edger may not always protect against thrown objects. To operate the edger safely there are various pieces of safety equipment you must wear.

1. Safety glasses that meet your national standard are used to protect your eyes from anything that might be thrown from the edger. Objects could be hidden in the grass. These objects include rocks, pinecones, sticks, wires, dirt and more. It's important to always inspect your work area before you begin.
2. Using an edger requires hearing protection. Repeated exposure to engine noise could lead to hearing loss. Approved earplugs or muffs will reduce the sound to a safe level.
3. Use gloves when conditions call for it, especially when it's cold outside.



4. Proper-fitting clothing is an essential part of safety for all equipment operation. Don't wear anything loose or restrictive. Clothing that's too loose could get caught in the moving parts of the equipment. Tight-fitting clothing restricts your ability to move freely and operate safely. Long pants are strongly recommended; shorts leave your lower legs exposed to flying debris.

5. Protect your feet with approved boots or shoes. Your boots should have an approved safety toe and a nonslip tread. While edging, your feet could come close to the cutting blades. A false step could lead to a serious injury. It's important to always make sure the proper guards are installed on the machine.

WATCH AND LEARN

Visit LandscapeManagement.net/SafetyWatch to view a video about how to safely operate edgers and use it as a training tool for your team.

SOURCE: LS TRAINING SYSTEM, LSTRaining.COM



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One landscape design/
build firm is expanding
beyond expectations.

► PAGE 38

Getting to know Zika

For those new to the mosquito control game, the question you're most likely to get this summer is, "Should I be worried about Zika?" **BY DILLON STEWART**



BACKPACKING
Experts suggest using a backpack blower when applying mosquito control products.

The Zika virus is here. Don't panic.

That's the message the National Pest Management Association (NPMA) shared at a webinar in May called "Zika: What you should know."

"In certain areas of the country, it simply will not be an issue," says Cindy Mannes, vice president of public affairs for NPMA. "So, our message is to not use fear tactics and to try not to scare people."

The last day of May brought the first reported U.S. case of a child with

Zika-caused microcephaly, a birth defect linked to the virus. In another high-profile case, Francisco Rodriguez, a pitcher for the Detroit Tigers, announced June 1 that he'd battled Zika for eight months while spending the offseason at his home in Venezuela. The illness affected part of his offseason training.

In fact, Zika has been here for months. As of June 8, the Centers for Disease Control & Prevention (CDC) said 691 travel-associated cases had been reported in the U.S. The only states that haven't had a case are Idaho, Wyoming, North Dakota and South Dakota. In U.S. territories, there had been four travel-associated cases reported and 1,301 locally acquired cases. The majority of those cases come from Puerto Rico.

The good news is the U.S. has not seen any locally acquired cases yet, meaning there is still time to control the disease in the states. The bad news is peak mosquito season is hitting now.

As mosquito control is a rising trend in the landscape industry, contractors new to the offering might not have experience fielding questions about potential outbreaks.

Here are a few questions you might be asked about the recent uptick in the Zika virus, covered during the NPMA webinar presented by researchers and professors of entomology, a member of the CDC's Zika task force and a panel of pest management company owners.

WHAT IS ZIKA?

Zika is a viral disease spread primarily through the bite of an *Aedes* species mosquito—such as the yellow fever mosquito

Continued on page 22

NEWSFEED

LOW COST FRANCHISE

CNBC.com listed Weed Man as one of "nine low-cost franchises that could make

you rich." Prospective new Weed Man franchisees make an initial investment of at least \$43,700.

TRUGREEN MAKES AMENDS

A TruGreen crew killed the grass at a Connecticut little league baseball field slated to host a major tournament later this summer. The company fixed the mistake,

which occurred after the crew mistook the field for the diamond next door, by installing new sod at the field.

DOVEWEED CONTROL

PBI/Gordon's Surge

Broadleaf Herbicide for Turf received a federal Insecticide, Fungicide and Rodenticide Act section 2(ee) recommendation for control of doveweed in six states.



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TURF+ORNAMENTAL CARE

Continued from page 20

and the Asian tiger mosquito—that is infected with the Zika virus.

Aedes mosquitoes are the perfect contractors of diseases like Zika, says Laura Harrington, Ph.D., professor in the Department of Entomology at Cornell University.

“They have a preference for humans and are stealthy biters,” she says. “Their habitats (also) are typically in close association and contact with humans.”

By “stealthy biters,” she means the bites often aren’t felt or anticipated until after the bite. Additionally, people typically associate mosquitoes with evenings and nights, but these guys are daytime feeders.

The virus can be transmitted other, less likely ways, such as sexually and through blood transfusions. Pregnant women or women planning to become pregnant should be most concerned, says Joe Laco from the CDC’s Zika Response Team.

“Zika virus can pass from a pregnant woman to her fetus during pregnancy or around the time of birth,” he says, noting the infection in pregnancy can cause microcephaly and other brain defects. Microcephaly is a birth defect in which a baby’s head is smaller than expected when compared to babies of the same sex and age. Health officials say the virus is also likely a trigger for Guillain-Barré Syndrome (GBS), which affects a small portion of the infected. GBS is a rare illness in the nervous system in which the immune system damages the nerve cells, causing muscle weakness and other issues.

HOW DO I KNOW IF I HAVE IT?

Zika symptoms are similar to flu symptoms. They include fever, rash, joint pain, conjunctivitis (red eyes), muscle pain and headache. Still, one in five people with the disease won’t show symptoms, the CDC says, though it’s in the blood stream for up to a week. Cases are often diagnosed through blood tests.

“Many people infected with Zika virus won’t even know they have the disease because they won’t have symptoms,” says Laco. “For those who do have symptoms, they are (typically) mild and last for several days to a week.”

Right now, there is no medicine or vaccine that treats the Zika virus. The CDC suggests infected people treat the symptoms with rest, acetaminophen to reduce fever and pain, and fluids to prevent dehydration. The NPMA reminds lawn and pest professionals they may be an authority on mosquito biology and control, but they are not doctors.

“We’re mosquito experts; we’re not disease experts,” Mannes says. “So it’s really important to talk about mosquito control, not the disease itself. For the disease itself, (clients) really need to talk to the CDC or the departments of health. That’s their expertise.”

WHAT DOES A PEST MANAGEMENT PROFESSIONAL DO TO PREVENT IT?

Unfortunately, pest management professionals cannot eliminate the spread of a disease like Zika—but they can help prevent it. The first and most important step is managing that expectation with the client.

“When a client hires a firm, the initial expectation is that they will have no more mosquitoes, no more bites, and that’s really difficult to do because when we’re dealing with mosquito control it’s in an outdoor environment,” says Jim Fredricks, Ph.D., vice president of technical and regulatory affairs for NPMA. “Mosquitoes are mobile and can certainly fly into a yard and bite your client.”

He advises pest management professionals to discuss their ability to reduce mosquito populations and reduce the number of bites they receive on their properties.



BREEDING GROUNDS
Standing water, even as shallow as a 1/2 inch, is an incubator for *Aedes* mosquitoes.

On the job site, it’s the pest control professional’s job to inspect the property, says Dennis Jenkins, president of ABC Home & Commercial Services in Lewisville, Texas. The biggest thing to look for is standing water, in which *Aedes* larvae breed. Up to a 1/2 inch of water—which can be found inside tires, tree holes, pails, plastic jugs, clogged gutters, birdbaths, catch basins, children’s toys, abandoned pools and flowerpots—can be incubators for *Aedes* in someone’s yard.

When a potential breeding site is located, check the site to see if larvae are present. *Aedes* will often rest near the top of the water. If it’s tough to tell if larvae are present in stagnant water, extracting samples of the water with a dropper can help improve the view.

Next come the pesticides. Standing water that cannot be eliminated can be treated with an appropriately labeled larvicide, such as Methoprene or *Bacillus thuringiensis*, says Fredricks. Check with your state for licensing requirements to apply these products.

“*Aedes* mosquitoes live near their preferred food source—us,” Jenkins says. “They have adapted to live in our environment, so treatment must focus on the areas where they live and rest.” His company uses “an adulticide with a good residual.”

Fredricks agrees with that choice and suggests applications be done with

a backpack blower, which produces large droplets of 150 millimeters to 200 millimeters. These droplets treat the interior of the plant architecture and deliver product to the locations where the mosquitoes are resting, according to Fredricks.

WHAT CAN HOMEOWNERS DO TO PREVENT IT?

This question and the previous one go hand in hand because mosquito control is a team effort, Jenkins says.

"Customer cooperation is vital to the success of the program," says Jenkins. "Without cooperation, unreasonable expectations will not only cause customer dissatisfaction, it will increase the liability for you and increase the likelihood that diseases will be vectored in the customer's environment."

“Our message is to not use fear tactics and to try not to scare people.”

—CINDY MANNES, NATIONAL PEST MANAGEMENT ASSOCIATION



Like the professional, the first thing the homeowner can do is eliminate breeding grounds around his or her property. It's not "one and done," as Jenkins says. Both parties must constantly monitor potential breeding grounds. Unseen breeding grounds are also less likely to form if the homeowner runs a fan outdoors to keep air moving.

The customer's biggest responsibility is to try not to get bitten. *Aedes* mosquitoes typically only travel 100 meters or less, so control is hyperlocal.

Jenkins, who supplies clients with a document outlining control suggestions, says to consider wearing long-sleeve shirts, long pants and socks with shoes. Clothing also can be treated with preventive products, such as permethrin spray, which often lasts up to 10 washes. Even DEET mosquito repellents—which are also suggested by the EPA and CDC for reducing mosquito bites—go a long way in the fight to prevent Zika and other mosquito-borne illnesses. 🐜



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OUT ON A LIMB ➔
Contractors entering the tree services market have a few different options.

To tree or not to tree?



Adding tree services to a landscape maintenance company is a big undertaking, but it can be a profitable one if done right. BY EMILY SCHAPPACHER

Justin Gamester always considered his firm to be a full-service landscaping company. Offering a mixture of maintenance, construction, irrigation, lighting and snow removal services, Piscataqua Landscaping in Eliot, Maine, could handle nearly all of its customers' needs—except when it came to tree services.



Justin Gamester

Lacking the necessary staff, equipment and expertise, Piscataqua Landscaping had to subcontract all of its tree work, which required placing its clients in someone else's hands.

"It was really a piece of the puzzle that we were not in total control of, and we were at the mercy of someone else's schedule," says Gamester, vice president of the \$9 million company. "Being able to offer tree services to our customers seemed like a natural fit and would allow us to be more in charge of the landscape."

Deciding to offer tree care services can be a major undertaking for a landscape maintenance company, as the work requires certified and experienced staff, specialized equipment and costly insurance coverage. But it can be a profitable endeavor when done

correctly. And it eliminates the need for clients to have to deal with other service providers. Three contractors who ventured into tree care in three different ways share the pros and cons of their experiences.

ACQUIRING THE ASSETS

Wanting to be in control of their clients' tree care needs, Piscataqua Landscaping acquired a small tree and plant health care company about five years ago and changed its name to Piscataqua Landscaping & Tree Service. The company hired the tree care firm's owner to manage the new division. The purchase also included the company's staff, equipment and customers. But most importantly, Piscataqua Landscaping & Tree Service acquired the knowledge it needed to run a tree care division, along with all of the necessary licenses, certifications and insurance requirements.

Continued on page 37

NEWSPEED

WIN AN EXMARK MOWER
Project EverGreen and Exmark are teaming up to raffle off an



Exmark Lazer Z X-Series zero-turn riding mower at GIE+EXPO. Tickets are \$10 per ticket or six tickets for \$50 and can be purchased at ProjectEverGreen.org.

STIHL GOES GREEN

Stihl acquired a minority share of Globe Tools Group, a manufacturer of corded and cordless outdoor power tools under the Greenworks brand. Terms

of the deal and the size of the stake purchased were not disclosed. Stihl said the move will help in the development and production of cordless products.

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COMPACT EQUIPMENT GUIDE



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Machines that can get into small spaces are a must for residential firms like Alpine Gardens.

BIGGER ISN'T ALWAYS BETTER

Three case studies examine the benefits of compact construction equipment.

BY LINDSEY GETZ

Three different businesses that opt for compact construction equipment echo the same sentiments again and again—bigger isn't always better. In fact, the landscape business owners we spoke with found that investing in compact equipment allowed them to get the job done just as well as full-sized equipment but with better ease-of-use and greater efficiency. In addition, smaller equipment can be particularly useful in tight job spaces, such as residential properties.

TIGHT SQUEEZE

COMPANY: Alpine Gardens, Fort Collins, Colo.

Efficiency and versatility are the two main reasons Nate Fetig values compact equipment. Along with three Caterpillar skid-steers, he also has a Bobcat E-32 mini excavator, six Bobcat MT series mini track loaders and several ride-on trenchers. With all the attachments available for this equipment, the owner of Alpine Gardens in Fort Collins, Colo., gives him a versatile toolset to work with on all the company's jobs.

"Almost every job we're asked to do could be done with the help of compact equipment," says Fetig, whose \$7.3 million dollar company is a 70/30 mix of residential/commercial work. "Ideally, we'd like to see our crews set up with a walk-behind track loader—one for each crew," Fetig says. "We're not at that stage yet, but we're working toward that for our installation side, which has 10 crews."

With many residential properties shrinking these days, Fetig says a machine that can do the job in a tight space is a "big deal" for his business.

About half of Alpine Gardens' work is residential design/build,

COMPACT EQUIPMENT GUIDE

37 percent is commercial installation and the remaining 13 percent is landscape maintenance. Compact equipment has assisted with all of it—and that's important since labor is hard to come by.

"Like everyone else in the industry, we're facing a labor shortage," Fetig says. "One way we're dealing with it is by mechanizing our crews to be more efficient."

With the help of compact equipment, he says his crews' days are "less labor intensive."

"We have an aging workforce, but with the use of compact equipment, we've been able to still ask our employees to work longer hours without the fear that it's going to damage their physical health," Fetig says. "That benefit alone easily makes it worth the investment."

Fetig says his success with compact equipment thus far encourages him to invest in more in the future. In particular, he likes the combination of the mini excavator and the mini track loader.

"When equipped with the correct attachments, they can perform nearly any task needed for landscaping," he says.

"With the trend of residential lots becoming smaller, what had been traditional landscape equipment (namely skid-steers) is becoming less useful, while smaller equipment is becoming more crucial, as they are better able to access the work-sites. The access element also becomes important with the rise in remodel projects in residential properties."



CREW SAVER

COMPANY: Denison Landscaping, Fort Washington, Md.

Compact equipment has become so ingrained in the workday at Denison Landscaping, that it's hard for Josh Denison, vice president of labor and human resources, to remember a time when they didn't rely heavily on it. He says the \$50 million-plus, Fort Washington, Md.-based company, which serves an 80 percent commercial client base, has been using compact equipment in one form or another for the past two decades. Over the last six years, Denison has become nearly exclusive with Kubota.

There are benefits to being brand loyal, Denison says. These include the level of support that you get from the dealer, being able to stock fewer parts since there's some commonality in filters and fluids, operator proficiency and mechanical knowledge.

The machine that gets daily use is the SVL75 compact track loader. The company has 59 of them and uses them to grade yards, dig ponds, lay sod and lift and carry dirt, plants and hardscape materials, among other tasks. Denison

says it's a dependable and durable machine that's easily transported from job site to job site. He adds that it has given the company company the advantages of reducing man hours, increasing productivity, and increasing efficiency in all facets of the job.

The company also has three SVL90s but Denison says they don't get as much use, as they aren't as easily transportable as the SVL75s. He also runs U17 and KX91 mini excavators for pond and irrigation work.

But the SVL75s, in particular, get the most use, says Denison, adding their versatility is a key advantage.

"You only need one machine to do it all," Denison says. "You don't have to go out and buy a trencher or an auger—you buy a trencher or auger attachment. The versatility in a single machine with the

“Our crews no longer have to lift the heavy materials they once did.”

—JOSH DENISON

PHOTO: DENISON LANDSCAPING

Making it safer for crews to operate is one perk of investing in equipment.

accompanying attachments is phenomenal. We're able to get so many functions out of one machine that it can complement all facets of our work load."

An additional benefit of compact equipment that's often overlooked is "safety and security," Denison adds.

"Our crews no longer have to lift all the heavy material they once did," Denison says. "There's an element of protection that we have by giving crews the ability to mechanically do their job. They can do more and they can do it safer."

Looking ahead, Denison says there's no doubt the company will continue to invest in compact equipment.

DOUBLE DUTY

COMPANY: D&B Landscaping, Livonia, Mich.

Having been in the industry for 44 years, Dan Bywalec, president of D&B Landscaping, in Livonia, Mich., says he's gone through an "entire gamut of equipment." He sought a machine that could assist with landscaping work and snow removal, and he found it in the two Avant 640 compact wheel loaders he owns, he says.

"At only 4-feet wide, it's an incredibly compact wheel loader that can get on sidewalks and do snow removal with ease," Bywalec says. "It also has over 2,000 pounds of lifting capacity as well as an actual boom. It gives us height of almost 11 feet and allows us to dump into a dump truck."

His company does a little bit of everything, Bywalec says. That

includes about 25 percent landscaping, 25 percent irrigation work, 25 percent snow removal, 15 percent lawn care and 10 percent hardscaping. The Avant 640 has been able to assist with the company's one-stop-shop approach to business.

Among the benefits of this machine, its small size has simplified transportation. Bywalec says that it can be easily transported by trailer, and it doesn't require a CDL license to haul this unit.

"We can take it out on the truck with a chauffeur license, which saves us money," Bywalec says. "We don't have to pay someone to drive it for us—our foreman can just take it out. That helps us keep our operating costs much lower."


Bywalec says the 100-plus attachments—including augers, stump grinders, backhoes and a mowing deck—increases his possibilities of using the machine year-round.

Dan Bywalec compares his compact wheel loaders to Swiss Army Knives.

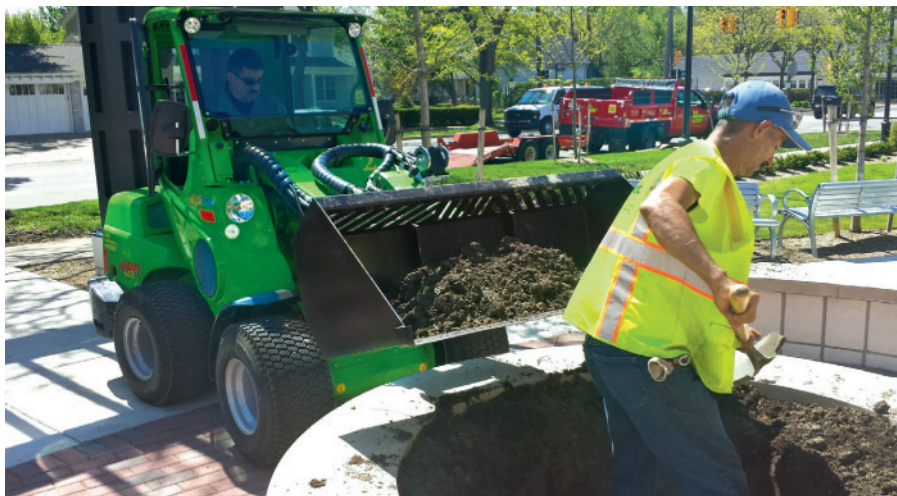
Other benefits include easy entry and exit into the machine and 360-degree visibility, Bywalec says. These units are almost always on a job site, he says—particularly on residential jobs, which make up about a quarter of the company's work.

"These machines can get into a backyard with no damage, which is huge on a residential job," he says. "It has increased our efficiency by about 40 percent on backyard residential jobs that were once tricky to get in and out of efficiently."

With all the bells and whistles that Bywalec has added, he acknowledges it's no small investment. Each one has cost him around \$54,000. But he says it's been worth every penny.

"If I were in the market for another piece of compact equipment, I'd honestly just get another one of these," Bywalec says. "The versatility allows us to do everything we need." 

Getz is a freelance writer based in Philadelphia.



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Case Construction Equipment



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The TV380 offers an EZ-EH (electro-hydraulic) setup menu with nine adjustable speed and control sensitivity settings that can be adjusted effortlessly as applications change. This allows the operator to match controls to their preference for comfort and greater productivity. A single rocker switch alternates between the CASE "H" operating pattern and ISO pattern controls for operators who are comfortable with one style or the other.

The CASE TV380 features an enclosed, fully sealed cab pressurized against noise and dust, and the industry's lowest entry threshold for easy access in and out of the cab. The cab-forward design provides best-in-class 360-degree visibility with excellent site lines down to the bucket edge, curb lines and to the rear of the machine. Features that further improve visibility include standard heavy-duty front and side-lights, a skylight, ultra-narrow wire side screens, and a large and curved rear window.

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Kubota



PLANT HEALTH
Treating trees with
fertilizers and control
products is one portion
of Piscataqua Land-
scaping's tree work.

Continued from page 24

"I think there's an advantage if you're able to purchase a company because you skip the step of having to find and hire the people, build the division and buy the equipment," Gamester says. "It's a perfect fit from a service standpoint because now we're truly a one-stop shop. We really do it all."

Gamester says adding tree care services made sense because the company sells this work to its existing clients. Staff members also had been noticing more incidents of tree disease and insect infestations on their customers' properties and wanted to be able to take care of these problems instead of referring their clients to other companies. Tree care now comprises about 15 percent of the company's service offerings, provided to a 50 percent residential, 50 percent commercial clientele.

"It's just been a great fit," Gamester says. "Any one of my account managers can now say, 'While we're here, we'd like to prune this tree,' or, 'You have scale on that tree.' We can take care of it all and can service the property that much better."

STARTING FROM SCRATCH

Jeff Bowen, owner of Images of Green in Stuart, Fla., added tree care to his service

mix three years ago. The \$1.6-million company offers 70 percent maintenance, 15 percent design/build, 10 percent tree care and 5 percent irrigation services to a residential clientele. Like Gamester, Bowen says he decided to add tree services because he did not like having to subcontract the work to other companies, most of which didn't perform up to his standards.

"We had some subcontractors who just couldn't cut the mustard," Bowen says. "This would lead to frustrations, annoyances and bad scheduling. As time went by, customers got more annoyed when stuff didn't go right, and that got to be troublesome on our end."

Bowen built his tree division from scratch, hiring a certified arborist who had the knowledge and experience needed to get things rolling and hire additional staff. Bowen also took the classes he needed to become a certified arborist. He invested about \$60,000 over a 24-month period on a new truck, a 22-foot dump trailer and other equipment including ropes, harnesses, chainsaws and safety gear. Bowen says his company billed about \$75,000 of tree work last year, so he has not yet been able to justify the investment in adding more specialized

equipment like a chipper or a stump grinder. Bowen still subcontracts stump-grinding work to a reputable third party.

Because of the risk involved with tree care work, Bowen's accountant advised him to start the new division as a separate company, which he named Jeff's Arbor Care, to protect Images of Green. But because Bowen says his company takes all necessary safety precautions and has not had any accidents or injuries, he saw no benefits to this structure and has since dissolved Jeff's Arbor Care and rolled the company into Images of Green.

"Since rolling it in, we have had no issues," he says. "I pay more insurance on my tree guys than on my maintenance guys, and I feel that my insurance covers me if something were to happen."

Bowen says that adding a tree division hasn't been easy. His company is often outbid by low-balling competition—and pruning an overgrown palm tree can be labor intensive. But it has helped improve client communication and keep jobs on schedule. The addition of tree work also has eliminated the need for his existing clients to have to find another company to fulfill those needs.

Regardless, Bowen is not convinced that adding tree services to a landscape maintenance company is the best move for everyone. He says the most successful companies he's seen are the ones that offer tree work exclusively, which Bowen says can be more profitable than maintenance.

"Tree work is a whole different animal," he says. "In the little volume we're doing, it's working well for us. But if I compare the same hours and

Continued on page 53



Jeff Bowen

DESIGN/BUILD+INSTALLATION

Rapid rise

Taking on a diverse array of new endeavors, Red Valley Landscape & Construction is growing quickly, with no signs of slowing down. BY EMILY SCHAPPACHER

Mike Freeman's company, Red Valley Landscape & Construction, has experienced the kind of growth that many contractors can only dream of.

Since its beginning in 2012, the \$5.3 million company in Edmond, Okla., has grown more than 220 percent, exceeding its five-year projections in just two-and-a-half years. The staff has expanded from five people to 20. In 2014, the company added commercial design/build work to its service offerings. It plans to add a home construction division this year and a commercial maintenance division in 2017. In addition, Red Valley Landscape & Construction recently broke ground on a new 80-acre facility. How is Freeman keeping all of these balls in the air?

"At the end of the day I'm the owner, but I have other teammates, and we work as a team," he says. "When we

have successes and failures, we learn from that, continue on and keep growing."

Freeman went to school for business and marketing but has worked in the landscape industry since 1997, starting out "at the bottom of the ropes." He began working in maintenance then transitioned into landscape design and installation. His job descriptions included tasks as diverse as sales, marketing and project management, but he soon discovered his true passion was designing and implementing outdoor living spaces for homeowners to enjoy.

Taking what he learned over the years and fulfilling his desire to spend his days outdoors, he started Red Valley Landscape & Construction in late 2012. The company provides 90 percent design/build services and 10 percent irrigation services to a 55 percent commercial, 45 percent residential clientele.

"I wanted a high-end landscape company that goes above and beyond and delivers things homeowners couldn't even imagine, and I wanted to be in charge of it," Freeman says. "The next progression was to start my own company and take what I had learned over the years and make it what we've become."

Red Valley has become known for creating outdoor living spaces that include beautiful landscapes and stonework, kitchens, pools and fireplaces—eliminating the need for clients to have to work with several contractors to create their ideal outdoor environment. Freeman said the company started out doing strictly residential projects with the intent to add commercial work by the third year.

With significant growth taking place in Oklahoma and Texas, the company was presented several commercial job opportunities and started



its commercial construction division a year early, in 2014. Red Valley's commercial division has since grown by 40 percent, and it already has a backlog of contracted work going into 2017.

HOMEWARD BOUND

Part of Red Valley's success can be attributed to Freeman's ability to seize an opportunity and run with it. The company's next goal is to launch a home construction division later this year. The endeavor is an extension of the company's design/build division, Freeman says. The plan is to build 3,000- to 9,000-square-foot homes on lots owned by homeowners and to partner with a residential development community

NEWSFEED

REGISTER NOW FOR HNA

Registration is now open for Hardscape North America (HNA) 2016, held in Louisville,

Ky., in conjunction with the GIE+EXPO Oct. 19-21. Early-bird registration ends Sept. 8.

2D TO 3D

Keysoft Solutions released KeySCAPE LandCADD, a tool to automate workflow processes. The system allows landscape architects to turn

conceptual landscape designs into fully developed 2D and 3D construction plans.

LET THERE BE LIGHT

Volt Lighting unveiled Decorative LED

Bollards, a new line of low voltage landscape lights. The lights come in two heights: 26-in. and 42-in. They also come in two different finishes: black and bronze.



GROWTH SPURT
Mike Freeman (center),
founded Red Valley
Landscape & Construction
in 2012.

breaking ground in the next year and a half.

Red Valley intends to work with the contractors, electricians and plumbers it already partners with on design/build projects. Plus, the company plans to provide the landscaping and irrigation systems for each home. There is one home construction project on the schedule for late 2016 and others in the planning stages.

"We do a lot of projects with large outdoor buildings, so the home construction side segues from doing these

structures," Freeman says. "It's really no different than what we do on an everyday basis. It's just bringing on the right team of builders and tradesmen and building a few more walls."

In 2017, Freeman plans to continue the company's growth into the commercial maintenance sector, either organically or through acquisition. Red Valley Landscape & Construction also broke ground on its new 80-acre facility last July with construction slated to be completed by the end of the year.

In addition to its offices, display gardens and a 14,000-square-foot production warehouse, the facility will house a fueling station, training site, three greenhouses, a holding yard and a tree farm. Freeman plans to add a stoneyard and a nursery in the next few years.

"I decided to build a new facility to be able to expand as the company continues to grow, and after looking for the right location for three years, I couldn't find anything (existing) that was right," Freeman says. "This will provide our employees an incredible place to work and be an environment that attracts future team members as we continue to grow."

HANDS OFF


Freeman understands these team members are an integral part of his company's success. He strives to manage all his new undertakings by hiring the right people and putting them in the right places. He looks for people with specific strengths—not just in landscaping but in areas like business and accounting—and sets them up with the tools and equipment they need for success. Freeman is a big proponent of hiring and promoting from within. He has several guys who have been with him from the start.

"I bring in the right people with the right talents, put them in charge of departments and let them be successful," Freeman says. "I try to hire people looking for a career, rather than people just looking for a job.

"Allowing employees to have a say in how the company is built so they are part of the team is important," he adds. "Any employee can come to work every day, but people get excited about being part of the decisions."

Since starting Red Valley Landscape & Construction, Freeman has continued to learn the ins and outs of running his own business. He's learned that creating a business plan is one of the most important things an entrepreneur can do. He's learned to be proactive and always to be thinking three to six months ahead. He's learned that having a diverse clientele is a good way to stay afloat when certain markets struggle. And he's learned how to cut his losses when things don't go as planned.

For now, it seems things are going even better than planned for Freeman and Red Valley Landscape. The most significant blip on the horizon is, surprisingly, the decline in oil and gas prices. It can hurt the economy in Oklahoma, which is driven by the oil and gas industry. But Freeman continues to look ahead and work toward making his company exactly what he wants it to be.

"I think if anyone said they weren't nervous about all of these new endeavors, they would be lying," he says. "But I see the direction the company is going and will continue to go, and we are building our team for the future." 

Schappacher is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.



Inside California's Drought

The Irrigation Association released its Drought Summit Report late last year. We break it down here. **BY DILLON STEWART**



ECONOMIC IMPACT

550,000 acres (6 percent) of farmland fallowed
17,000 lost jobs
\$2 billion hit to the economy



96

Percent of California Landscape Contractors Association members who say clients are concerned about the drought.

2/3



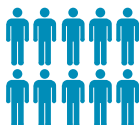
Fraction of water savings that came from fixing sprinkler systems, according to a study of turf removal programs.

NUMBER OF RESIDENTS IN CALIFORNIA

1900—
2 million people



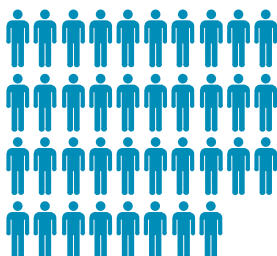
1950—
10 million people



2000—
30 million people



2013—
38 million people



SOURCE: PUBLIC POLICY INSTITUTE OF CALIFORNIA

5

California's drought is in its **5th year** with no signs of slowing.

SOURCE: CALIFORNIA STATE WATER RESOURCES CONTROL BOARD

26

Percent reduction in water use in California since 2015.



CONSUMPTIVE USE OF WATER IN CALIFORNIA

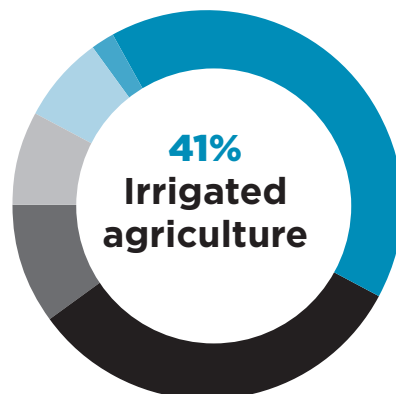
32% Wild and scenic rivers

10% Urban

8% Instream flow

7% Required delta outflow

2% Managed wetlands



IA'S TIPS FOR THE LANDSCAPING INDUSTRY:

1. Adopt a model irrigation ordinance at the local level to increase irrigation efficiencies in newly installed commercial and residential landscape irrigation systems.
2. Authorize the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency's WaterSense program and incentivize the use of WaterSense-labeled technologies and services.
3. Invest in improving existing irrigation system efficiencies and management.
4. Work to improve nation's water infrastructure, including conveyance improvements and increased storage.

SOURCE: All information comes from the Irrigation Association's Drought Summit Report unless otherwise noted.

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NEWS- FEED

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SMART IRRIGATION MONTH

July is Smart Irrigation Month, the Irrigation Association's campaign to educate professionals and homeowners about efficient water use and products. Visit SmartIrrigationMonth.com for more information or to get details about posting a #SmartSelfie on social media to help get the word out about saving water.

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electric spray pump

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Eric Remeis
(right),
president of
Yard Solutions
near Columbus,
Ohio, and one
of his mentors,
Elliott Tobias.

WHO'S YOUR

PHOTO: JERRY MANN

Eric Remeis knew his 26-year-old landscape company was in a position to grow, but he needed some advice getting there.

So why not ask for it?

In 2015, the president of Yard Solutions in Groveport, Ohio, engaged a few people he knew could ease his company's growing pains.

He credits these mentors—a former neighbor-turned-consultant and a landscape industry veteran—with facilitating the company's 30 percent boost last year to \$3 million. And he expects to continue that trend.

Mentors come in many forms, and few people dispute their benefits. But only a sliver of small business people—8 percent—have one, according to a 2015 survey by Spark Business from Capital One. The reasons for not having a mentor include lacking the time to cultivate these relationships and not knowing where to begin.

But Remeis and other landscape professionals show how a mentor—or two—is well worth overcoming these obstacles if you're willing to put in the hard work.

MENTOR?

Landscape pros and their mentors prove how these relationships can accelerate growth.

BY MARISA PALMIERI

"Working with a mentor doesn't get you where you want to be," he says. "But it helps give you a path, and it will help you speed up the process. I haven't hit the promised land, but it should fast forward things."

SECOND-HAND LEARNING

That fast-forward effect is what Jeremy Thorne is getting out of his relationship with mentor Scott Burk, president of Scott's Landscaping in Centre Hall, Pa.

Thorne, owner of ThorneCare Landscape Solutions in Sugarloaf, Pa., is in his second year of business. He met Burk a few years ago as a student at Penn College of Technology, earning his associate degree in landscape/horticulture technology. Burk, a Penn State grad, often guest speaks at both Penn College and Penn State.

"I picked up quickly that Jeremy was pretty serious," Burk says. Burk hired Thorne shortly after to intern, and



Scott Burk

he stayed on at Scott's Landscaping for about a year and a half.

Before long, Thorne realized it was time to scratch

his entrepreneurial itch, and he began talking with Burk about his plan to start his own company in another part of the state. Thorne still remembers that day.

"Scott took me out for lunch—it was a three-hour lunch," he says. "It wasn't about trying to keep me. It was about, 'This is what you need to do to be successful.'"

Burk also recalls that conversation and similar ones he's had with other mentees over the years.

"I'm trying to help people get where they want to be," he says. "I'm not trying to hold them here, but I want to be very honest with them. I tell them, 'You're going to lose money.' I ask, 'Are you prepared to work 20 hours a day?' 'Is your significant other prepared for this?'"

"I never try to talk anybody out of (starting a business) if it's their goal, but you really need to know the good and the bad before you make the decision to jump in."

Today, Thorne, who is active with the National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP) and earned the association's Young Entrepreneur of the Year Award last year, speaks with Burk several times a week.

"I'll tell him my situation, and he'll see how he can help," Thorne says. He credits his mentor with many things, including teaching him estimating and the importance of having good attorney and banker relationships.

WEB EXTRA

To learn more about the meetings Yard Solutions implemented, visit the Web Extras section at LandscapeManagement.net.

"It's a very good relationship. He's a great mentor to me," Thorne says. "Having that person who understands where you are is helpful."

Mentors have been invaluable to Burk, as well. He counts his former Penn State Professor Dan Stearns and fellow members of the Pennsylvania Landscape & Nursery Association as some of his best resources.

"You can learn so much, and you don't have to learn it out of your own pocket," he says, adding that he learns from Thorne and other mentees, too.

"We'll work through problems together," he says. "They may not be my problems, but I still learn from them."

MEET YOUR MATCH

There are many ways to connect with a mentor, inside or outside the industry. Understandably, many landscape professionals seek industry-specific mentors, and some state and national landscape associations offer formal programs to meet that need. In fact, connecting with peers and potential mentors is one of the primary reasons many people join associations in the first place, says Chris Kocel, member services manager for the Associated Landscape Contractors of Colorado (ALCC). Many mentor/mentee relationships evolve casually from networking, he says, but some members prefer a structured program where they're paired up with a member who has volunteered to be a mentor.

ALCC's mentoring program is called Peer-to-Peer. It has a handful of participants at any given time, says Becky Garber, director of communications. Those interested in being a mentor or mentee complete a short application and the association acts as a matchmaker.

NALP also has a mentoring program called Trailblazers.

Trailblazers are "an elite group of landscape industry leaders who were nominated



During a Trailblazer visit in 2015, Mike Rorie (center) advised Eric Remeis (left) and his brother Scott Remeis.

by their peers for making significant, long-term contributions to the industry," NALP says. Members who are interesting in spending a day with a Trailblazer apply for the program by Dec. 31 to be matched with a mentor the next year. After being matched, the mentor and mentee set up a time to meet and one travels to the other's facility. Mentees pay the travel costs.

FAST FORWARD

Last year, thanks to the Trailblazer program, Remeis connected with one mentor, Mike Rorie, to help with the tactical side of building a landscape maintenance division. Then, he engaged another mentor, Elliott Tobias, to assist with strategy.

With their help, Yard Solutions saw significant growth last year, and its sights are set even higher with a goal to reach \$10 million by 2020.

"My two main goals for having Mike here were to help us grow the business overall and

to grow our maintenance division, since that's what he specializes in," Remeis says.

Some background:

Rorie sold his first commercial landscape maintenance firm, GroundMasters, to Brickman in 2006. He went on to found Go iLawn, an online property measurement service, and he got back into maintenance a few years ago with GroundSystems.

First, Rorie visited Yard Solutions in spring 2015. He spent a day touring the company's facility, meeting the staff and hearing about its processes and challenges.

Next, Remeis visited Rorie's operation in Cincinnati, and the pair spent five hours detailing how to grow the Yard Solutions maintenance division.

In addition to recommendations like tracking sales activity and close rates, Rorie encouraged the company to add a full-time maintenance salesperson, and Yard Solutions made it happen this year, in time for fall bidding season. The company



Mike Rorie

**"YOU CAN
LEARN SO MUCH,
AND YOU DON'T
HAVE TO LEARN IT
OUT OF YOUR
OWN POCKET."**

—SCOTT BURK

transitioned former Operations Manager Scott Hall into that role and added a manager on the operations side.

"We're on our way to selling \$1 million per year in maintenance for the next five years," Remeis says.

Meanwhile, Yard Solutions is going strong in design/build, which makes up 70 percent of its business. In early spring, it had about \$1 million in backlog.


"We're solid there, and we want to keep it streamlined for low growth so we can get some momentum in the maintenance area at this point," he says. "The money we make off design/build is going to fuel maintenance."

Outside of working on the maintenance business, Remeis enlisted another mentor, Tobias, in strategic planning, and he is excited about the results.

Tobias, who used to be Remeis' neighbor, is a former corporate human resources executive who founded consulting firm Intersect HR Strategy. He worked with Yard Solutions leaders late last year to set up a strategic plan and implement a structure to execute the plan.

The biggest takeaway, Remeis says, was rethinking the company's operating system and organizing it around key meetings that allow the company to be proactive and more efficient.

Yard Solutions implemented the meetings, even though it required Tobias to push the staff outside of its comfort zone, as only a mentor can do.

"In the past, we always wanted to make things perfect before we made them live," Remeis says. "He made us implement these meetings, and they weren't perfect, but he said, 'You have to start things before they're perfect.' We did, and we found we could move at another speed." 

WEB EXTRA

For a list of landscape industry peer groups, visit the Web Extras section at LandscapeManagement.net.



A Jeffrey Scott peer group convenes with Mariani Landscape CEO Frank Mariani and President Fred Wacker.

PEER MENTORING IN ACTION

Peer groups—within the landscape industry or within your region—are one way some professionals pursuing excellence find mentors.

Typically, these groups meet several times a year at one company's location and participate in multiple conference calls.

Last fall, one peer group had a unique experience when it visited Mariani Landscape in Chicago's northern suburbs. Rather than host the meeting at one of the member's locations, facilitator Jeffrey Scott made arrangements for Mariani to guest host the event. Mariani Landscape CEO Frank Mariani, President Fred Wacker and the staff were generous with their time and information. The experience was beneficial for many of the members and demonstrated the value in one company opening its doors to other operators.

Following the meeting, Scott shared a few reasons he believes Mariani's company is one of the largest, most successful companies in the industry. These include his focus on the long view, which means a continued pursuit of personal development and networking with key people in Chicago, like architects and bankers; his ability to build an excellent team; and his passion and generous nature—he always says "yes" when he can.

"He's the hardest-working man in the landscape business," Scott said, noting Mariani still goes on sales calls, often attends networking dinners and onboards new employees. "He's invested completely, and that's why Mariani Landscape continues to grow, and that's why he's one of the leaders in the industry."

Scott's peer group members agreed. Here are some of their key takeaways.

"What I gleaned the most was witnessing their financial review meetings. So we now bring in all of our satellite managers, VPs, account manager and sales and project managers. Each profit center presents their numbers to the group. As a group, we discuss, together, what has worked well, what hasn't worked well, and what we should start doing, stop doing and continue doing."

Nathan Helder, president, Gelderman Landscape Services

Waterdown, Ontario

"Last year, (Mariani) raised their starting pay in the spring. I loved that idea. So, we decided to raise the labor rate \$4 per hour for all our snow removal staff. We went from having a hard time finding guys to having guys waiting in line, and they're good guys. So if you make \$15 per hour, during a snow removal event you're making \$19 per hour."

Leigh Townsend, president, J.W. Townsend Landscapes

Charlottesville, Va.

"My takeaway was Frank surrounds himself with a lot of talent, and he has the ability as an owner to get out of the way and let team members excel at what they do. He got out of the way a long time ago, otherwise it wouldn't be a \$50 million company."

Paul Harness, general manager, Plant Specialists

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BUSINESS BASICS: PEOPLE

LET'S GROW

CASE STUDY: ADD-ON BIZ



A BIG MOVE

Adding on a large tree transplanting service is no small feat, but it's doable for a committed landscape company.



PAGE 51

How to engage employees



BY MEL KLEIMAN

The author is the founder of Humetrics. He helps companies build high-quality, frontline, hourly workforces. Reach him at mkleiman@humetrics.com.

Other than a paycheck, do you give your employees any good reasons to come to work each day?

If your answer is “not really,” here are a few ideas to help you pump up employee engagement, which has a direct correlation to retention and makes recruiting new hires easier, too.

1 Differentiate yourself. What do you offer that other employers don’t? Are your policies more family-friendly? Maybe you’re more flexible or you promote from within more often? Whatever it is, talk it up and publicize it. Your people may not know or notice unless you point it out.

2 Be inclusive. Solicit employees’ opinions, brainstorm solutions to problems, tell them the whys of what is required of them and never let the reason be “because I said so.”

3 Recognize jobs well done. The best way to encourage positive behavior is to recognize it

immediately. Make the recognition specific and personal. Whether it’s written or verbal, it should go something like: “(Person’s name), you handled that (specific task/interaction) in the best possible way. I really appreciate how you (specifics of what the person did).”

4 Give your undivided attention: Regularly, be it once a year or once week, set aside some time for a meeting or lunch with each of your key players (the ones you would hate to lose).

5 Make work fun. Conduct friendly contests, tell jokes, pass out lollipops, bring in bagels on Fridays, ring the bell when a sale is made and celebrate employment anniversaries and birthdays. There’s no reason work can’t be fun, and there are lots of good reasons why it should be!

6 Express your appreciation. In addition to recognizing specific tasks well done, appreciate your people for behaviors that make

a difference. Thank them for helping coworkers, for great teamwork, for dependability and for taking responsibility. What you focus on increases, so focus on what you appreciate.

7 Reevaluate your rules. Ground rules ensure that everyone is on the same page about how the game is played. Where some employers go wrong, however, is they don’t trust their people to do the right thing, so they have a rule or regulation for everything. Make sure every rule is necessary and that everyone understands why it is.

8 Be a role model for respect. All work is worthy of respect, and management sets the tone. When employees feel respected and valued, they’ll respect management, each other, and, most importantly, your customers.

9 Build relationships. Good relationships with managers, coworkers and clients are just as important to most employees as their compensation. Once again, management sets the tone with things like team building exercises, mentoring programs, asking employees to help vet potential new hires and roundtable, brainstorming meetings.

10 Make accountability your modus operandi. Let it be known that everyone will be held accountable for meeting their commitments and fulfilling their duties. This does not involve placing blame. Rather, when someone falls short, seize the opportunity to find out what went wrong and why and how to improve systems and communications so it never happens again. ☺

Think happy
Employee engagement has a direct correlation to retention, Mel Kleiman says.



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LET'S GROW

Instagram for the landscape industry



BY SHAUN KANARY

The author is director of marketing for Weed Pro in Sheffield Village, Ohio, and adjunct professor of marketing at Baldwin Wallace University.

Presentations, brochures, design books—our industry is ruled by photographs. Whether it's a beautifully designed patio or a weed-free lawn—pictures allow us to make an emotional connection with our customers and sell our services. So, it's not too surprising that I consider Instagram—a photo-centric platform—to be near the top of my list of the best social media channels for the landscape industry.

WHAT'S INSTAGRAM AND WHO USES IT?

Instagram, which is owned by Facebook, has more than 400 million users. Similar to Facebook and Twitter, it's a timeline-based feed platform, allowing you to build a community of followers and follow others. Users upload pictures and have the ability to apply artistic filters to them. You also can create three- to 60-second videos.

Instagram's users could be an attractive one for your business. More than half of its users are 18-29 years old and 28 percent are in the 30-49 age bracket, so it's a great way to reach millennials.

GREAT FOR THE GREEN INDUSTRY

A great social media strategy often revolves around driving consumers from individual posts to your website, then encouraging them to convert into customers with various calls-to-action. With Instagram, there's no ability to place "clickable" links within posts, nullifying the ability to send traffic to your website. With this limitation, many businesses shied away from the platform at first. But now they're seeing it as an opportunity to engage with their audience.



Instagram isn't widely used (yet) in the landscape industry, but it's a great way to showcase the beauty you create on a daily basis. Consider this platform to be a living, breathing portfolio that features your best work. Some ideas for captivating posts include: photos of completed jobs; photos of products, plants and accessories; photos of employees, staff and clients; or short tips, job tour or highlight videos.

TIPS FOR GROWING YOUR AUDIENCE

1. Post photos that inspire or entertain. Inspiration comes in many forms. Whether you're a landscaper or a mowing company, users can find beauty in everything from a patio to a freshly striped lawn. Showcase that beauty by adding filters or text to give posts more meaning.

2. Use hashtags. Instagram users mark important topics with the hashtag (#) symbol, categorizing the post by topic for those searching on the platform. Using popular hashtags allows new users to find your posts. But be careful. Don't overuse hashtags or use popular hashtags that have nothing to do with your product or brand just to appear in popular discussions. Consumers can see that your "#JustinBeiber juniper" is a failed attempt to jump onto a popular hashtag. It's best to use Instagram's search feature to identify popular

hashtagged words in our industry. Stick to no more than five per post.

3. Use contests to expand your reach. Nothing generates engagement quicker than contests. Better yet, user-generated content created in response to contests can help you spread your brand quickly on Instagram. Having users post their own content with your brand hashtag or by tagging your username can help create unbiased promotions from your consumers that will be seen by their followers. For example, a lawn care company could hold a contest for their customers to share pictures of their green lawn. This approach could drive more business by exposing the brand to others.

4. Use influencers to leverage others' audiences. Leveraging other users to help expose your brand to a new group of people is one of the best ways to grow your audience. Identify those brands or people who have a significant "influence" (number of people they reach and interact with) on other users of the platform, and reach out to them to help promote your messages. By producing posts that help support them or compliment their brand, you'll be able to ask them to return the favor.

MEASURING YOUR ROI

While every business person is focused on revenue-generating channels, customer engagement opportunities can help keep your customers happy, increasing their lifetime value. Keeping these objectives in mind, your brand can create an Instagram channel that provides value to your organization in more ways than just sales. 

WEB EXTRA

Visit the Web Extras section at LandscapeManagement.net to learn more about Instagram advertising.

CASE STUDY: ADD-ON BIZ

Move it!

One landscape business owner has found a unique service in moving large trees. BY CASEY PAYTON



Large tree relocation requires specialty equipment and know-how.

Two decades ago, Drewe Schoenholtz's clients were putting on a home addition that would require them to cut down a beautiful blue spruce. Schoenholtz, owner of The Green Scene, remembers thinking, "There must be a way we can move this tree."

And there was. After some research on the process, Schoenholtz rented the proper equipment and moved the tree to the backyard, where it thrived.

Following that success, he realized he was on to something. More than 20 years later, Schoenholtz has moved thousands of trees. It's become a profitable service for the West Windsor, N.J.-based business owner.

Reaching out to builders and pool companies, Schoenholtz first began promoting his large tree relocation service by letting contractors know they had the option of moving a client's tree instead of cutting it down. His business grew by word of mouth, and he's also run some print ads.

After five years of renting a tree spade, Schoenholtz had enough work to purchase a tree spade, a commercial truck and accessories—an approximately \$330,000 set-up. When the housing market took off, he purchased two more. In his best year of performing the service, Schoenholtz moved more than 300 trees. When the Great Recession hit, business slowed.

"When new construction stopped, that really hurt the tree-moving business," Schoenholtz says. "We were able to ride it out and in 2010 things did start coming back." Now the company moves about 150 trees a year.

Moving a tree with a tree spade typically requires a two-man crew, but the work could require as many as eight men if the tree can't be transplanted with a tree spade.

Pricing tree-moving jobs is complicated, Schoenholtz says. It varies based on how many trees; site conditions; whether the client wants clean-up, grading or rut fixing included; and other factors.

"Like any job, I really base the price off of experience of how much work is going to be involved," he says, adding that moving a single tree with a tree spade could cost about \$500, and it goes up from there."

It's taken Schoenholtz a long time to perfect both the pricing and execution of this offering. After all, there's no training offered or school you can attend to learn this service.

"I figured it out as I was going," he says. "You'd have to get a job working for someone who does this—that's how you learn it."

HAND IN HAND


Along with his tree-moving service, The Green Scene also has a tree growing operation, so it can supply mature trees to properties that need them.

"I can talk to a client about a design and tell them they could have a tree that provides shade without having to wait 20 years for it to grow," Schoenholtz says. "Their look of astonishment is still my favorite part of the job."

Schoenholtz has been in business for 42 years, both moving and selling trees. He says the tree relocation business is a bit of an "unusual

gig," but it's one that he thinks brings value to clients.

"A tree brings lasting value to a yard," says Schoenholtz, adding that the largest tree he ever moved was a 55-foot cedar. "They can add beauty, provide shade, give families a place to play—and they can be around for generations. It's not something that people just want to cut down."

"This isn't something that anyone can do," Schoenholtz says. "Besides the cost of the equipment, there was a lot to learn. It took years to get good at moving trees. Now, I have a good sense of how much a tree weighs, the best fertilizer to use, how big the root ball should be and other important factors. I've become known as someone who can move a tree when others said it couldn't be done." 

Payton is a freelance writer based in Philadelphia.

SERVICE SNAPSHOT

COMPANY: The Green Scene

HEADQUARTERS: West Windsor, N.J.

SERVICE: Tree relocation services

EMPLOYEES: 10

ANNUAL REVENUE: Not disclosed

CLIENT MIX: 85% residential; 10% commercial; 5% municipal

SERVICE MIX: 40% landscaping; 40% hardscaping; 20% tree growing and relocation

BEST TIP: You need the know-how to do a job like this. Start by working for others.

BIGGEST CHALLENGE: Proving the value large trees can bring to a property.

FUNGICIDES



↑ FAME SC FUNGICIDE

COMPANY: FMC

URL: FMCProSolutions.com

The systemic activity of fluoxastrobin, the active ingredient in Fame SC, protects turf from several diseases, including brown patch and zoysia patch. The product features a rainfastness of 15 minutes, FMC says.

↓ EAGLE 20EW SPECIALTY FUNGICIDE

COMPANY: Dow AgroSciences

URL: DowProvesIt.com

Eagle 20EW is labeled for curing and preventing more than 15 turf diseases, including brown patch, dollar spot and powdery mildew. It works from the inside out, protecting new foliage by translocating to new growth, Dow says. When applied according to label, it won't inhibit growth or development of turf or ornamentals.



↓ CARAVAN G FUNGICIDE/INSECTICIDE

COMPANY: Syngenta

URL: GreenCastOnline.com

Caravan G combines Heritage fungicide and Meridian insecticide to control and prevent a broad range of insects and diseases, including white grubs and brown patch. One application means less fuel, labor and overhead costs. A light irrigation or even heavy dew will disperse the active ingredients systemically into the plant.



→ STROBE 50WG

COMPANY: Quali-Pro

URL: Quali-Pro.com

Quali-Pro's Strobe 50WG from Control Solutions is a wettable granule that offers pre- and postemergent control of many turf and ornamental fungal diseases. With preventive and curative properties, Strobe 50WG protects plants systemically to control pathogens causing foliar, stem and root diseases including stem blights, leaf spots, patch diseases, mildew, molds and rusts. Strobe 50WG is available in 1- and 6-lb. tip-and-measure containers.



ARMADA 50 WDG ↑

COMPANY: Bayer

URL: BackedByBayer.com

Armada 50 WDG protects against 16 diseases that affect both turf and ornamentals. Its exclusive dual mode of action helps reduce the need for inventory and provides 21-28 days of residual control, the company says. Quick-dissolving granules are easy to store and measure. It can be applied to all turf types.



“We would mow a lawn 26 times a year and not make as much as a guy taking out one tree.”

—JOSH SKOLNICK, MONSTER TREE SERVICE



Continued from page 37

dollars in maintenance work, I'm making more doing trees. If I found myself generating more tree work every year, I might think about doing less maintenance, quite honestly.”

GOING ALL IN

Josh Skolnick started out as a landscape maintenance contractor, offering everything from mowing to lawn care. But lacking the proper equipment, staff and insurance, his company had to subcontract all work on trees taller than 15 feet. Skolnick became interested in the idea of offering tree care—and was particularly interested in what tree companies could charge for a few hours of work.

“We would bring in third parties that would bill customers directly, and I was always intrigued by the dollar figure,” Skolnick says. “We would mow a lawn 26 times a year and not make as much as a guy taking out one tree.”

In 2007, Skolnick sold his maintenance company to focus on other endeavors but continued to receive calls from former clients requesting tree work.

In 2008, he removed a tree for a former client as a favor using a contract climber and, in the process, sold \$20,000 worth of work on that customer's street alone.

Knowing he was onto something good, Skolnick founded Monster Tree Service in June 2008. He learned the ropes by “trial and error and by investing in the personnel to get the company where it is today.”

Monster Tree Service, headquartered in Fort Washington, Pa., is now a franchise with 31 locations throughout

the U.S., offering 70 percent general tree services and 30 percent plant health care services to a 95 percent residential, 5 percent commercial clientele. Monster Tree Service's annual system revenue is more than \$10 million.

Monster Tree offers a franchise conversion program to guide landscape maintenance contractors through the process of adding tree services to their repertoire. This program includes helping them determine the proper certifications, licenses and insurance coverage required for their region; financing the necessary equipment; and providing sales and marketing systems.

It makes sense for maintenance contractors to expand into tree care services, Skolnick says, because they're already on clients' properties several times throughout the growing season and have the opportunity to upsell the work. But, perhaps more importantly, tree work can be very profitable.

“Existing clients are typically loyal,” Skolnick says. “If their landscape contractor can perform the services quoted to them by an outside party, they are more likely to go with their contractor.”

“In my personal experience, contractors who go through a conversion and enter tree care will end up dissolving the landscape work they are doing,” he adds. “As the tree side grows, they see more profits generated through tree care than landscaping, and they begin to transition the company over to being a tree care provider. Getting into the tree industry is a higher risk but a higher reward.”

Schappacher is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.



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LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT (ISSN 0894-1254) is published monthly by North Coast Media LLC, 1360 East 9th Street, Suite 1070, Cleveland, OH 44114. Subscription rates: For US, Canada and Mexico, 1 year \$59.95 print and digital; two years \$95.95 print and digital. All other countries, 1 year print and digital \$169.95; two years \$255.95. For air-expedited service, include an additional \$75 per order annually. Single copies (prepaid only) \$10 plus postage and handling. For current single copy or back issues, call 847-763-4942. Periodicals postage paid at Cleveland OH 44103-9603 and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Please send address change to Landscape Management, PO Box 2090, Skokie, IL 60076. Printed in the U.S.A.



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BACKSTORY

INTERVIEW BY MARISA PALMIERI



Kent Miller

PRESIDENT
CARETAKER LANDSCAPE & TREE MANAGEMENT
GILBERT, ARIZ.



Miller holds the Facility Management Professional designation from the International Facility Management Association.



Miller's hobbies include golf, big game hunting with a bow and arrow, hiking and kayaking with his pedal-drive Hobie tandem.



"I got active because I wanted to walk a mile in the moccasins of my clients. They're great people, and I get to give back to them."



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Central High School
Sioux City, Iowa
Class of 1970

Fort Dodge Community College;
Pima + Cochise Community Colleges
1972-1973; 1977-1980

WORK EXPERIENCE

1970-1980

Clerk
U.S. Army + Department of Defense
Fort Huachuca, Ariz.

1980-1981

Real estate professional
Century 21 Frontier
Tucson, Ariz.

1982-1985

Co-founder/stockholder
Tana-Wind International
Tucson, Ariz.

1985-2011

Vice president, sales & marketing
The Groundskeeper
Tucson, Ariz.

2012-2013

Regional sales
CMS Facilities Services, Las Vegas

2013-2015

Business development manager
GHD, Las Vegas

2015-Present

President
Caretaker Landscape
& Tree Management

"I joined the Army out of high school to be a helicopter pilot. I didn't get my (desired) school, as the Vietnam conflict was gearing down. I spent most of my time producing classified documents."



Kiwani's

"I met the founder of The Groundskeeper at Kiwanis."



"About a month ago, we were having our lot resurfaced and I asked if I could park my fleet in The Groundskeeper's parking lot. They said 'sure.'"

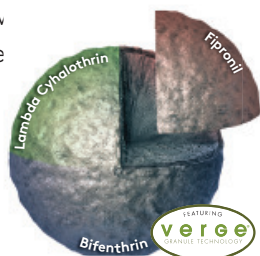
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