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CALL FOR PROJECTS

Has your company tackled a major irrigation project lately? If so, we'd like to feature it in an upcoming *Water World* (see p. 48). Email Senior Editor Abby Hart (ahart@northcoastmedia.net) with your idea, and your company may be featured in an upcoming issue of *LM*.

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2020 vision

Happy New Year! How many of you were like me and pondered aloud on New Year's Eve how strange it felt to be ringing in the year 2020? Was it really 20 years ago that my best friend Mike had me sweating widespread blackouts and a massive computer shutdown? It doesn't seem like it was that long ago.

Now that we're in the year 2020, I can't help but think of eyesight and 20/20 vision. Back in 2000, I was going back and forth between glasses and contact lenses. But now I have 20/20 vision (actually, better) thanks to LASIK surgery. I would recommend LASIK to anyone who is a good candidate. Seeing crystal clear all day is something I don't take for granted.

I'm excited to see what visions 2020 brings me in year two of sitting in the *Landscape Management* editor-in-chief chair. Before I look ahead, here's one last look back at 2019 — at the best sights while on the job:

Autonomous mowers in action 2019 was the year that showed me how close we are to seeing autonomous mowers being used as a solution to the labor crisis in our industry. I saw at least five different companies demo

robotic mowers, from small units made for individual yards to a massive golf course fairway mower with a 100-inch cutting width. These autonomous mowers are no longer a vision of the future but a viable option for today. Do you foresee yourself using robots to mow, or are you already using them? Email and tell me your story.

Ready-set-go at 2019 National Collegiate Landscape Competition It was fun to see how competitive college students were at the 2019 NCLC in Fort Collins, Colo. This was best displayed in the hardscape competition, when teams of students were challenged to complete a hardscape installation within a specified amount of time. A referee called out "3 ... 2 ... 1!" and sounded an air horn. The students sprinted to their plots and got busy. It felt like being at a track and field event, but instead of running with batons, the students ran with bow rakes and shovels. Even better than seeing these events was hearing how many of these soon-to-be-graduates had multiple job offers awaiting them upon graduation.

Changing of the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier I was in Washington, D.C., for the National Association of Landscape Professionals' Renewal &

Remembrance, an event that has landscape companies volunteer their time to improve the grounds at Arlington National Cemetery. While there, I saw the guard at the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier. I'm notoriously impatient when I'm at work events. I'm always worried that there's a great story right around the corner, and I'm wasting valuable time not seeking out that story. Plus it was hot as Hades out, so I was ready to move, but *LM* publisher Bill Roddy told me to sit still for a minute to see the changing of the guard. Watching this ceremony in person — the precision, the dedication, the gravitas — made me proud to be an American. I hope to take my kids there to see it themselves someday. The 2020 Renewal & Remembrance takes place on July 20. If you haven't ever been, it's something you should consider.

There were a lot of other interesting things I saw in 2019, like the *LM* Growth Summit, featured on page 12, the NALP Field Trip in San Diego, co-hosted by Marty Grunder and Frank Mariani, GIE+EXPO in Louisville and various factory tours along the way. And, there were a lot of things I didn't have time to see based on scheduling conflicts (Jeffrey Scott's Driven to Win event, which included racing BMWs at the BMW Performance Center, tops that list.)

What sights will my LASIK-enhanced eyes behold in 2020? I can't wait to see. 📷

“I'm excited to see what visions 2020 brings me in year two of sitting in the *Landscape Management* editor-in-chief chair. Before I look ahead, here's one last look back at 2019 — at the best sights while on the job ... ”



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See more great advice and complete answers from our Editorial Advisory Board in the online version of this feature at LandscapeManagement.net.

How can landscape pros stay motivated during the winter months or slow season?



“The best use of time when the fieldwork slows down is to make a plan and then execute. These plans should

involve analyzing what you did in the past and how it worked out ... as well as looking at new ways of growing your profits, people and knowledge.”

Landscape Professionals

Richard Bare
Arbor-Nomics Turf
Norcross, Ga.

Troy Clogg
Troy Clogg Landscape Associates
Wixom, Mich.

Paul Fraynd
Sun Valley Landscaping
Omaha, Neb.

Luke Henry
ProScape Lawn & Landscaping Services
Marion, Ohio

Chris Joyce
Joyce Landscaping
Cape Cod, Mass.

Aaron Katerberg
Grapids Irrigation
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Jerry McKay
McKay Landscape Lighting
Omaha, Neb.

Bryan Stolz
Winterberry Landscape & Garden Center
Southington, Conn.

Greg Winchel
Winchel Irrigation
Grandville, Mich.

Industry Consultants

Dan Gordon
TurfBooks
Newton, N.J.

Marty Grunder
The Grow Group
Dayton, Ohio

Phil Harwood
Grow the Bench
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Kevin Kehoe
3PG Consulting
Laguna, Calif.

Jeffrey Scott
Jeffrey Scott Consulting
Trumbull, Conn.



“We stay motivated in the winter by preparing for a successful 2020, renewing contracts and updating our goals and strategies for the coming season. Also, hopefully (we have) lots of snow to push.”



“We stay motivated by ‘rocks,’ a system laid out in the book ‘Traction’ by Gino Wickman. It helps us have short-term goals and a 90-day focus to get them done. The term ‘rocks’ comes from the metaphor of putting the big things in the jar first and then working on the smaller ones.”



“Don’t think of it as a slow season, just as a season where activities may shift to working ‘on’ instead of ‘in’ the business.”

“Keep a running list of ideas throughout the year (improvements, opportunities, etc.) and then select a handful of the best ideas to tackle during these slower times.”



“Staying motivated is easy ... (it’s) fear of failure. Build a budget, review account profitability, install software that works, have a team retreat to build the team and delegate responsibility.”



“To me, winter is the time to take care of all the things us busy landscape pros don’t have time to do in the other nine or 10 months ... For me, the weather can be a downer, so I always make sure to take at least one trip to someplace warm to do some relaxing and thinking.”



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LM GALLERY

Snapshots from the LM Growth Summit in Orlando, Fla.

1 All smiles Jeremy Moore, Quali-Pro national accounts manager (left), and Nick Strain, business director for Quali-Pro (center), take a second to say hello to North Coast Media President and CEO Kevin Stoltman.

2 Gang's all here George Kinkad, president of Turfco, LM Editor-in-Chief Seth Jones, Jason Bishop, regional manager of KingGreen Lawncare in Gainesville, Ga., Jennifer Jorge, COO of KingGreen Lawncare, and LM Publisher Bill Roddy smile for the camera.

3 Three's company LM Associate Publisher Craig MacGregor (right) with Karl McCullough (left), CFO and partner of McCullough's Landscape and Nursery in New Albany, Ohio, and Marc Terwillinger (center), president of One Two Tree in Miami.

4 Pin perfect Jesse Smith, president of Royal Greens in Frederick, Md., won the closest-to-the-pin contest. What was that Jesse, an 8-iron?

5 Big hitter, long ... Strain of Quali-Pro smashed the longest drive at the Growth Summit scramble. That ProV1 will never be the same.

6 Straight shooters Bishop of KingGreen Lawncare, LM Editor Christina Herrick, Jud Hudnut, territory manager for Prime Source, and Mike Depriest, owner and president of Longs Peak Longmont, Colo., might not have taken first, second or even third place ... but they did win a prize for being the most honest team during the LM Growth Summit scramble. Funny, you'd think an editor would know how to use the eraser end of a pencil!





7 A break from the action McCullough (center) of McCullough's Landscape and Nursery and Nate Moses, president of Precision Landscape in Greenville, S.C., stop for a photo with MacGregor.

8 If you build it Roddy (left) with Peter Wood, account manager of Hyde Park Landscape in Mystic, Conn., discuss their favorite baseball movies. For Wood, "Field of Dreams." For Cleveland-bred Roddy, it's "Major League," of course.

9 Having a good time Brent Mills, general manager of Steel Green Manufacturing (center), and his wife, Deanna Herron-Mills, with LM Eastern Regional Sales Manager Dan Hannan.

10 The doctor is in Jerry Grutz, owner of Lawn Doctor of Madison in Madison, Wis., is pictured with Jones and LM Digital Media Content Producer Tyler Gunter.

11 Florida in the house John Fowler, vice president of sales for Anuvia Plant Nutrients, gets his photo taken with Dusty Montiel, general manager of One Two Tree in Miami.

12 Strike a pose Dwight Bizzell, vice president of Bizzell Nursery Co. in Sikeston, Mo., MacGregor, Luke Hawthorn, owner of Emerald Lawns in Round Rock, Texas, and Roddy take a short break from the fun for a photo op. See page 52 for our '5 Questions' with Bizzell.

Irrigation Show touts innovation

BY SARAH WEBB | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR



Nearly 9,000 attendees, 600 exhibitors, 56 entries in the 2019 New Product Contest. One Irrigation Show.

The 2019 Irrigation Show, hosted by the Irrigation Association and co-located with the National Ground Water Association and the American Rainwater Catchment Systems Association, took place Dec. 2-6 in Las Vegas.

Throughout the trade show floor, the words “innovation” and “sustainability” could be heard as irrigation contractors and exhibitors alike discussed the latest and greatest technology in the industry.

The week also included various education sessions and panel discussions highlighting recent trends, the

latest research and best practices for agricultural and landscape irrigation techniques. Young irrigation professionals, such as Irrigation E3 learners, also had the chance to learn more about the industry and take part in networking events such as a Young Professionals Breakfast.

The show floor was open to attendees beginning Dec. 4. That morning was kicked off with a resounding message from keynote speaker Jim Abbott. Abbott was a Major League Baseball pitcher — playing for teams including the California Angels, New York Yankees, Chicago White Sox and Milwaukee Brewers from 1989 to 1999 — who attained success despite being born with one hand. “We can do some-

The 2019 Irrigation Association Show, held in Las Vegas, saw nearly 9,000 attendees throughout the week of Dec. 2-6.

thing about the challenges that come before us,” Abbott said. “The question is what action will you take to adapt to the challenge?”

He relayed to irrigation professionals in attendance that because of the ongoing changes in today’s world, the irrigation industry must learn five qualities, making up the acronym, ADAPT — adjustability, discipline, accountability, perseverance and trust.

“Find a new way of doing things, and make the most of what you have,” he said. “Then, nothing can stop you.”

PROMOTION AND A DINNER

When one of his team members gets promoted, Timothy Trimmer, president of Professional Grounds in Lorton, Va., takes a personal interest. Read the letter Trimmer wrote to employee Jason Cave's family after Cave was promoted to account manager.



Shawanda, Tony, Aryana, Danae and Jayden,

I am so happy to let you all know that your father has taken a big step in his career, as he received a promotion to account manager!

He sets a great example for the team members at Professional Grounds as I am sure he does at home, as well. I am so excited for Jason's future at Professional Grounds.

Thank you for supporting him, letting him stay late to finish his work and even missing an occasional snow day with you all.

Please use the enclosed gift card to take him to dinner to celebrate his promotion.

Thanks!

Timothy Trimmer

NEW YEAR, NEW GOALS

You've likely seen *LM's* Question of the Week on social media. We wanted some insight on readers' goals for the new year, so we posed the following question on Dec. 9: What are your business goals for 2020?

See more responses at [Landscapemanagement.net/webextras](https://www.landscapemanagement.net/webextras).

f "We are on a two-pronged attack. Improve customer service and focus on increasing our productivity through a better training program. We believe this will show our employees that we value them, along with improving our bonus structure for our foreman."

— Jack Holmes, owner, Degree Lawn and Landscape, West Chester, Ohio

in "Utilize more sustainable practices without compromising results or increasing cost to our clients."

— Steve Mendez, owner, U.S. Lawns, St. Simons Island, Ga.

tw "Finding any(one) with a pulse who will actually show up for work."

— Tim Habazin, owner, Northern Scapes, Pittsburgh, Pa.

In Memoriam: Peter Shiplov of PermaGreen

Peter Shiplov, 62, died Nov. 24 following a battle with cancer. He was a lifelong resident of Valparaiso, Ind., and a green industry expert who worked at PermaGreen Supreme in Valparaiso.

"Peter was a fantastic person and the first guy to give me a hug in this market," says *LM* Associate Publisher Craig MacGregor. "It was after our first *LM* Growth Summit. He knew I was a bit green, and after the event, hugged me and said, 'You have the ability to connect. You are going to do just fine.' For an expert in the industry to come to me, unsolicited, with some guidance is something I will never forget. We lost somebody irreplaceable, and my prayers are with his family."

Bland Landscaping Co. acquires Landmark Landscape Services

Bland Landscaping Co., a North Carolina provider of commercial landscaping management services, acquired Landmark Landscape Services of Huntersville, N.C. Terms of the transaction were not disclosed.

Landmark, founded in 2006 by Owner Mark Michel, provides landscape maintenance, enhancement and irrigation services. Bland Landscaping, based in Apex, N.C., ranked No. 79 on the 2019 *LM*150 list and provides landscape design, installation, enhancement and maintenance services.

"We are thrilled to partner with Landmark," said Kurt Bland, Bland's president and CEO. "As Bland Landscaping continues to scale and expand our regional presence, Landmark provides a key branch location in the fast-growing metropolitan area north of Charlotte."

Doosan Bobcat to acquire Bob-Cat Mowers, Steiner and Ryan grounds care brands

Doosan Bobcat plans to acquire the assets of Bob-Cat Mowers and the Steiner and Ryan brands of ground care equipment from Schiller Grounds Care.

"As a pillar of our growth strategy, this acquisition will complement our existing business and expand our footprint to additional, growing industries," said Scott Park, president and CEO of Doosan Bobcat. "These successful brands bring market leadership and closely align with our vision, which will further diversify our business as we expand the reach of Doosan Bobcat ..."


Under the agreement, Doosan Bobcat will acquire the Johnson Creek, Wis., manufacturing facility, and the Bob-Cat Mowers, Steiner and Ryan brands of ground care equipment. The Schiller Grounds Care employees working at the Johnson Creek location and the distributor and dealer direct field sales and technical support teams will join the Doosan Bobcat team once the acquisition is finalized.

TIME WELL-SPENT



LM Growth Summit attendees say networking with partners and fellow LCOs is invaluable to their businesses

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR



“f you’re not here, you’re missing out” seems to be the consensus from attendees of the 2019 *LM* Growth Summit.

“Anyone who has thought about attending and hasn’t should reconsider and come,” says Brandon Hyde, vice president of Hyde Park Landscape in Norwich, Conn. “It will be an experience they won’t forget.”

As lawn care professionals, it’s so easy to estimate the return on investment (ROI) of a new piece of equipment, but the ROI of time is harder to calculate.

“To take three days away from your company is sometimes not easy to do, but I think it was three days well-spent for us here,” Hyde says.

Now in its eighth year, the *LM* Growth Summit is unique based on how it’s structured. There are individual one-on-one meetings between supplier-partners and attendees and plenty of time for lawn care operators (LCOs) and partners to network at meals and during activities each day.

“(This) gave us the ability to interact with others in the industry, which you wouldn’t normally get,” Hyde says.

The individual meetings are a leg up on traditional trade shows, says Dwight Bizzell, vice president of Bizzell Nursery Co., in Sikeston, Mo.

“We are really one-on-one,” he says. “You don’t have to sit there and wait to ask a question or have to come back because they are too busy. If you’re serious about your business, these people are serious about theirs, as well, and they’re not here to just waste your time. (It) makes you feel exclusive.”

It’s also a great opportunity for attendees to get exposure to partners and products they may not have heard of, as was the case for Dusty Montiel, general manager of One Two Tree in Miami.

“One of the companies here I would have never come across if I wouldn’t have been here — Anuvia,” he says.

Montiel says he was very excited to see how the company’s granular fertilizer will work in his location with the different types of grasses he works with.

Twenty-seven attendees from lawn care operations around the country participated in this year’s event, and they say the experience was invaluable.

“It’s a value that you can’t put a dollar figure on,” Montiel says.

PARTNERS

Eight partners — representing equipment, fertilizer, herbicide, fungicide and insecticide vendors — joined the 27 attendees. Here’s a snapshot of the partners and the products they highlighted:

Quali-Pro

Houston-based Quali-Pro has 50 active ingredients, 130 formulations and 400 stock keeping units, which allow the company some flexibility in its offerings.

“We can put a lot of products together that normally other companies wouldn’t think of doing and come up with synergy, and it’s something that end users need,” says Jeremy Moore, national accounts manager.

One such combination is Negate, which is a combination of metsulfuron methyl and rimsulfuron herbicides. Nick Strain, business director, says it’s an “affordable product to control *Poa* in Bermudagrass lawns.”

Another is Strobe Pro G, which is a granular fungicide combination of azoxystrobin and propiconazole. Strain says one of the benefits is low dust following application.

Quali-Pro’s insect control offerings also garnered interest during the *LM* Growth Summit.

“A lot of our customers have asked about mosquito control, which we have a new product called Proflex that has shown excellent control,” Moore says.

Strain says another overlooked part of lawn care is plant growth regulators (PGRs). Quali-Pro offers T-Nex and Ethephon 2SL PGRs.

“I think they’re the unsung hero of the lawn care side of it,” he says. “If you’re spraying, if you have a lot of fence posts, a lot of areas you don’t want to weed eat, places to trim, look at your PGR options. They can be a big time-saver if you look at them versus labor and fuel. It’s much cheaper to use a plant growth regulator in those areas to reduce trim time.”

Turfco

Turfco, from Minneapolis, may have just celebrated 100 years in business, but “we are very focused on innovation,” says George Kinkead, president.

Kinkead says his family’s company, now in its third generation, has an eye on the future of its customers. Its main focus is on how to increase staff productivity through different equipment designs.

Continued on page 14



TRY IT OUT
Attendees got a chance for product demos on equipment like this spreader/sprayer from Turfco.

Continued from page 13

"When you're selecting equipment, it's critical if you look at what type of equipment you are going to buy and (ask) 'am I going to attract people and retain people that I want to?'" he says. "In our mix of products, we basically focus on innovative products that can give you the ability to scale and retain employees."

Highlights of the Turfco presentation include ride-on applicators, a walking aerator and a riding aerator with a seed box on the front.

Kinkead says aerators used to be a challenging piece of equipment for operators, but Turfco designed the TurnAer XT5 with a reverse function, so users don't have to lift and turn the unit. As the product was out for testing, he says it was the "first time I saw a guy with a smile on his face running an aerator."

For the TurnAer XT8 stand-on aerator, Kinkead says, "They're three times as productive as the walking units. Some guys even have productivity above that."

Turfco also offers a drop-seeder attachment for the TurnAer XT8. It has a 30-inch seeding width that matches the XT8's aerating width. It holds up to 65 pounds of seed and mounts on the front of the aerator.

Turfco also demoed its new T5000 riding spreader/sprayer. It's a larger version of its T3100. The T5000 spreader/sprayer includes hands-

free speed control and a boomless sprayer. It can hold 60 gallons of liquid product or 325 pounds of granular product.

Prime Source

Prime Source is a post-patent and proprietary chemical company based in Middlesex, N.C., with 76 products in its portfolio, including herbicides, fungicides, insecticides, liquid nutrients and adjuvants.

"(If) we see there's a void out there in the market, we will come up with solutions," says Justin Watts, senior vice president. "Some of that may be some of our own products. Sometimes we will partner with other manufacturers where it makes sense."

Watts says one such partnership is Zelto, a biological nematicide that Prime Source brought to market with Marrone Bio Innovations. And Watts says Prime Source is primed for the future with some promising products in the pipeline.

"We've got a lot of stuff in the hopper that we're really excited about, that we can't say a whole lot about now," he says. "It's really looked good in some university trials that we've been doing this summer."

CONNECTIONS
At the Growth Summit, LCOs meet with partners they might not have otherwise.

PHOTOS: SETH JONES (LEFT), CHRISTINA HERRICK (RIGHT)



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Walk Behind Spreaders

For Michael Falconer, president of Walk Behind Spreaders, the evolution from lawn care professional to entrepreneur came out of necessity for his lawn care operation. He used LESCO hydro spreaders because he found them to be the most efficient spreaders for his mainly residential business.

"We felt those power spreaders were the most efficient, quickest for residential on and off the truck and the lowest priced if you have to buy one for every single truck," he says.

When LESCO stopped producing them in 2009, Falconer decided to build a power spreader of his own. He sold his first spreader in 2014.

Upgrades to Falconer's spreader include a larger frame, Honda engine, stainless steel and aluminum features and more. The spreader is also available with a four-wheel kit.

"A lot of people want it to be more stable," he says.

While a three-wheel spreader may tip over in transit, he also makes a carrier for the spreader to prevent this.

Falconer says these spreaders are best suited for 5,000- to 10,000-square-foot plots. And, he's working on an electric version.

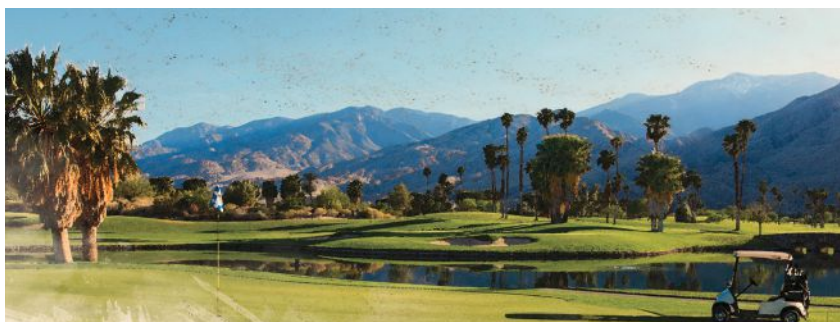
"When I was building it for my business, everybody else needed it.

Continued on page 16



SHOW IT OFF

Michael Falconer (left) first built a power spreader out of need for his lawn care operation.



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COVER STORY

Continued from page 15

That's how it turned into its own type of business," he says.

Falconer says some of the highlights to his spreader are its efficiency in both use and upkeep.

"It lasts forever," he says. "It's easy to work on and the least-expensive built powered spreader that's available."

Anuvia

Anuvia Plant Nutrients is a manufacturer of homogenized granular fertilizer products made from organic materials. The organic material used is reprocessed, broken down and infused with other nutrients designed for the turf market.

"It's sustainable, and it's certified organic ... USDA bio-based as well," says Chuck Barber, vice president of Anuvia. "You're not only feeding the plant; you're feeding the soil."

Barber says Anuvia's fertilizer doesn't leach, volatilize or denitrify. Each fertilizer prill includes nitrogen, phosphorus, potash and iron.

"Now, there is no fertilizer that's 100 percent efficient, but this is very efficient compared to your standard fertilizer that you might be buying today," he says.

Barber says coming to the LM Growth Summit is particularly special for the company because the company met one of its largest customers at the LM Growth Summit a few years ago.

"It just shows what this format can do," he says. "We've become friends, which we both value, and our company values as well."

Barber and John Fowler, vice president of turf market sales, say that's at the heart of the LM Growth Summit — developing relationships.

Steel Green

The goal for Steel Green Manufacturing at the LM Growth Summit was to raise awareness for the brand, which has only been in business for a year and a half.

"We're here to help (end users) in any way that we can," says Matt Smith, sales manager.

THE RUNDOWN

Mike DePriest of Longs Peak Landscape gets the scoop on Steel Green's machines.



PHOTO: SETH JONES

Steel Green demoed some of its ride-on spreader/sprayer models. Sizes range from the largest model — the SG52, which can hold 50 gallons of liquid and 325 pounds of granular materials — to the smallest model — the SG36, which can hold up to 30 gallons of liquid and 225 pounds of granular product.

“It’s small enough to get through those gates but more productive,” Smith says of the SG36.

Each Steel Green spreader/sprayer has a zero-turn radius and comes standard with a 21-hp engine, dual drum brakes and a 20/50 amp charging system.

Steel Green is known for its ability to help create customized equipment by listening to and meeting a client’s needs.

QUALITY TIME
Attendees say the one-on-one meetings with partners are a leg up on traditional trade shows.



“You might need two pumps on your machine; we’re the guys that are going to figure out a way to make that happen,” he says.

Smith says another calling card of his company is customer service.

“We answer calls, we live and breathe this industry,” he says of the five founders, noting that customer service extends to taking cellphone calls and answering inquiries via Facebook.

Nufarm

This year marks the fourth time Nufarm has attended the LM Growth Summit as a partner. Both Jamie Heydinger, national cool-season LCO manager, and Rod Marquardt, national warm-season LCO manager, see the importance in returning year after year.

“We keep doing it every year, and it’s because we find value in it,”

Continued on page 18

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PROGRESSIVE
COMMERCIAL



Continued from page 17

Marquardt says. “You want to build a relationship with (the attendees), and you don’t do that by sitting at a table for 30 minutes, talking business. You build a relationship through having dinner together and having breakfast together, golfing together and spending time together.”

These conversations, they say, are both with existing customers and new people in the industry.

“You go to the next level of what they’re dealing with, and you get to know them more,” Heydinger says.

Heydinger and Marquardt took the opportunity at the *LM* Growth Summit to educate attendees unfamiliar with Nufarm’s broad portfolio and companies Nufarm has acquired in the last few years, including Etigra and Cleary Chemical Corp. Nufarm is also the exclusive distributor for turf and ornamental, aquatic and industrial vegetation management products from Valent U.S.A.

“We have solutions for about every conceivable issue you might have, and then we continue to innovate and add more products to the pipeline,” Heydinger says.

Gregson-Clark


Part of what Rhett Clark, president of Gregson-Clark, hoped to get out of meeting with attendees was to hear if users have ideas or things they wish the company’s spray equipment offered.

“We like to innovate,” he says.

The company, which is based in Caledonia, N.Y., manufactures commercial spraying and liquid-handling equipment.

The company’s V-series skid sprayers feature a balanced, compact design, which is well-suited for use in pickup trucks. The sprayers are available in sizes from 50 to 300 gallons and standard or custom pump and engine combinations, hose reels, spray hoses and guns. For pickup trucks, the hose reel can mount opposite the pump and engine. For vans and flatbeds, it can mount underneath.

Modular add-on tanks are available with the V-series skid sprayer, so users can carry two different solutions and three-way valves, which enable users to work from either tank or transfer between tanks.

Heavy-duty wiring is included in electric rewind rails, which use the vehicle’s battery. Users can also add-on the 505-injection system for spot treatment or blanket applications. Other accessories that operators like to use are a high-pressure strainer, air gap fuel system, closed roller die, air pump and removable diffuser for composting applications, strainer bags and boom kits. 

INNOVATE
At the *LM* Growth Summit, Gregson-Clark looked to gain insight for new product ideas.

WE’RE ALL FRIENDS HERE

When asked what he thought of the *LM* Growth Summit, Jim Beveridge of Yards Done Right in Westlake, Ohio, says, “I already told our entire Facebook group about it.”

Beveridge is the “mayor” of Facebook, says his wife, Judy. Mayor may be an understatement as Jim and Judy Beveridge are administrators of the Professional Lawn Care Applicators Group, found at [Facebook.com/groups/992097187496029/](https://www.facebook.com/groups/992097187496029/).

Jim Beveridge says he started this group, which has just shy of 2,000 members, three years ago because he saw a need for those in the lawn care industry to connect. And while it’s grown, the Beveridges say the group stays close to its roots, where conversations are civil and embrace the spirit of helpfulness, whether it’s an issue with a piece of equipment or a question about a product.

“It’s just a great sounding board for anything that happens day to day in the business,” he says. “It’s basically something where people will open up and talk freely.”

There are criteria for joining so the administrators can protect the integrity of the group. There are also ground rules to follow. Members get perks including discounts on products such as lawn signs, answering services, fertilizers and more from vendors who are also members of the group. There’s a mentoring arm, as well.

“We’ve got guys that this is their first year, and we’ve got guys like Jim going on year 43,” Judy Beveridge says. “We’re just here to help educate and support each other and save money along the way, too.”

A few of those nearly 2,000 members attended this year’s *LM* Growth Summit, and this added to the personal feel, says Vinnie Ambrose, owner of Ambrose Pest & Turf Management in Lakeland, Fla.

“It’s cool to come and reconnect with people in the Facebook group that we connect with on a regular basis,” he says.



Jim Beveridge



Judy Beveridge

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PRODUCTS THAT WORK

Spray away

Spreader/sprayers help a lawn care operator maximize his business

BY ABBY HART | LM SENIOR EDITOR

Five years ago, Andrew Hoffman, owner of Hoffman's Lawn & Fertilization, got tired of using a push spreader and a spray reel on lawns in his hometown of Delaware, Ohio.

Two years earlier, he moved his business from Ohio from Salt Lake City. "In Salt Lake City, you could get away with a hose reel and a push spreader with smaller lots," he says.

After he moved back to Ohio, the larger sizes of residential lots had him scrambling for a way to cover more ground.

Hoffman purchased a PermaGreen spreader/sprayer and hasn't turned back. The company, which brought in \$2.2 million dollars in lawn care, maintenance and pest control in 2019, uses PermaGreen and Exmark spreader/sprayers.

"They're amazing, can't go any other way," Hoffman says. "The average hose is 300 to 350 feet, and anything beyond that you're bringing a backpack and cutting into your man-hours."

Hoffman currently services lawns up to 5 acres. "The biggest benefit to the spreader/sprayer is simply having the ability to spread granular, spot spray and do a blanket application at the same time instead of having to do each separately," he explains.

The spreader/sprayers have changed his business dramatically. "We didn't advertise weed control until we got that machine," he says. "I didn't feel we could do a good job in lawn care without it."

The first year with the spreader/sprayer, the company made \$10,000 in lawn care. Today, the company has 1,200 lawn care accounts — \$390,000 in lawn care revenue and rising.

"This year, all I want to be pushing is lawn care—for us, it gives us the fewest complaints from a service perspective," he says. The company conducted an audit of its complaint and question frequencies and found that for every 30 maintenance visits, there was one complaint. Compare that to one complaint per 80 visits for lawn care and one per 1,000 visits for pest control.



Andrew Hoffman



↑ SPRAY ON
Hoffman's Lawn & Fertilization has grown significantly since purchasing a ride-on spreader/sprayer.

For LCOs looking to purchase a spreader/sprayer, he recommends they do their homework to find the best machine and investigate whether there are good service options for the equipment. To repair his equipment, Hoffman takes his Exmarks to the dealer, but he says it often turns into a joint repair between the dealer and his mechanics because oftentimes, dealers don't have enough experience working on spreader/sprayers.

To cut back on the repair visits, Hoffman advises operators to winterize and empty the water, flush the nozzles and fill the lines with antifreeze. For daily maintenance, he recommends cleaning the filters and the machine every day, especially the lines, paddle and hopper. **LM**

MANUFACTURER'S VIEW

Matt Smith, sales manager at Steel Green, says that the lawn care operators he speaks with tend to be concerned about the time savings and man-hours they could potentially save. "They like to ask questions about top-end speed and the approximate amount of time when going back to fill up the truck," he says.

Smith says that depending on the size of the spray tips and the sizes of the tank, with typical spreader-sprayers, operators can cover two to four acres before having to fill their tanks. Having a speedometer, a pressure gauge and properly calibrating a spray tip size on a spreader/sprayer allow the operator to control the amount of product he is applying and ensure his company isn't over- or undercharging customers for the amount of fertilizer it's using.



Matt Smith



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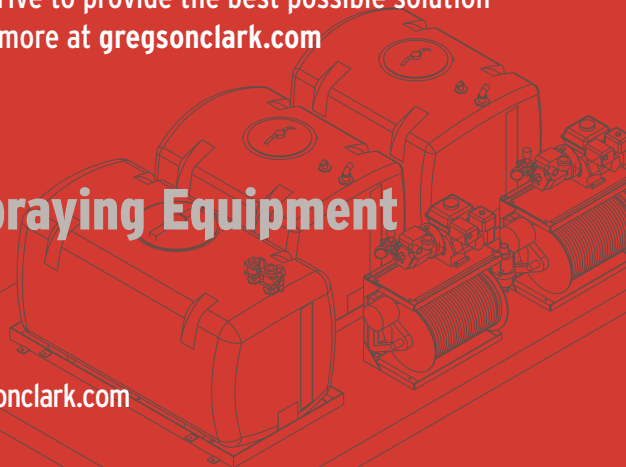


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BUSINESS BOOSTERS

Franchising: What you need to know

New and established franchisees say that community and resources have helped their businesses grow

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

“You’ve got to work on your business, not in your business,” says Benjamin Schoot, a franchisee with The Grounds Guys in Myrtle Beach, S.C. “The longer you’re on a truck, the longer you’re handcuffing your business.”

Schoot is not alone in this assertion. The motivation to join a franchise is often more about the need to grow a business than the day-to-day operations.

New and veteran franchisees from TruGreen, NaturalLawn and The Grounds Guys share their experiences, the type of support they get and advice for lawn care professionals mulling the jump to franchising.

WORDS OF ADVICE

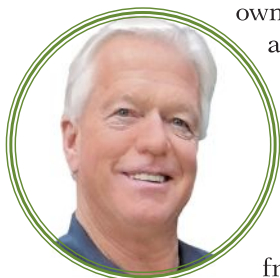
“Do your homework,” says Jon Bennett, a first-year NaturalLawn franchisee from Scranton, Pa., who was a golf course superintendent and assistant superintendent for 13 years prior. “What does that franchise provide you as an owner? What are you paying your money into, that startup fee — what does it give you?”

Bennett’s business is 98 percent residential with 65 percent focus on lawn care, 15 percent pest control, and the rest is a mix of both services. This year, he hit \$75,000 in revenue and eyes doubling that figure next year with the addition of a full-time technician and a part-time technician in the fall.

Another important piece of advice from these franchise owners is to understand the economics and layout of the area.

“Is it a tightknit community, or is it spread out?” asks Dennis Roberts a TruGreen franchisee in Billings, Mont. “Does it feel good? Is it the kind of market you’d want to be in?”

Roberts was an early TruGreen franchisee, first helping then-ChemLawn open one of the first franchises in



Dennis Roberts

DO YOUR HOMEWORK

Jon Bennett, a first-year NaturalLawn franchisee, says it’s important to do research on an organization before becoming part of that franchise.



the late 1970s in Kentucky and then helping open franchises in Iowa and Colorado. In the early 1980s, Roberts took the opportunity to open his own ChemLawn franchise in Billings. He now has five franchises in Montana.

Roberts’ franchises netted close to \$5.3 million this year. His clients are 85 to 90 percent residential.

Schoot says it’s also important to set small, reasonable goals, especially when it comes to earnings.

“You can’t come in as a startup and say ‘I want to be a million-dollar business,’” he says. “Why don’t we talk about \$300,000?”

Schoot’s Myrtle Beach business is 60 percent design/build and installation and 40 percent mowing and landscape maintenance. His clients are 70 percent commercial and 30 percent residential. He hopes to be close to \$2 million in revenue this year, and he’s been in business for 12 years.



Benjamin Schoot

SUPPORT SYSTEM

“Oftentimes, franchises are looked at as a disadvantage because you have to pay franchise royalties, but what you get from that corporate company or franchiser is much more valuable than the royalties you have to pay to be a franchisee,” says Kevin Vidrine, a TruGreen franchisee in Lafayette, La. “You walk into a wealth of resources.”

Vidrine was originally a Scotts LawnService franchisee, joining in 2007, and became a TruGreen franchisee when the two companies merged in 2016. Vidrine’s business is mainly residential, with a focus on turf and ornamental

Continued on page 24

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BUSINESS BOOSTERS

Continued from page 22
care. It does about \$4.75 million in annual revenue.

Franchises also come with the advantage of offering almost limitless resources, too.

"Anything we need, we make a phone call and say, 'I need help with a cellphone plan,' or 'I need help with product orders,' or 'I need to buy fertilizers,' or 'I need to buy a new truck,' or 'I need help with collections,' or 'I need help with computer software,'" Vidrine says. "Anything — and I mean anything — that we need in our business, TruGreen has a resource for."

And it's these resources that are the main draw for many lawn care profes-



Kevin Vidrine

sionals. That's the case with Bennett.

"I didn't like to start from scratch," he says. "(The franchise has) the expertise, the marketing — everything that comes with running a business, it has knocked down in the 30-plus years it's been doing it."

For Jim Laramee, who started a NaturaLawn franchise with business partners in North Attleboro, Mass., in the early 1990s, the support from NaturaLawn ranged from agronomic training to setting up a telemarketing call center.

"That support was extremely helpful to us setting up the business," he says. "And it still is now."

Laramee's \$7.2 million business is about 98.5 percent residential, with a focus on lawn fertilization, mosquito control, seeding, trees and shrubs.

For Schoot, a highlight of joining The Grounds Guys was a dedicated franchise business coach, "somebody that you can bounce ideas off of," he says.

And that business coach also helps push the franchisees to keep moving the business forward, which is exactly what both Schoot and fellow The Grounds Guys franchisee Matthew White were looking for in a franchise opportunity.



Jim Laramee

Continued on page 26

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BUSINESS BOOSTERS

Continued from page 24

"He pushes me and makes sure I'm making good, sound decisions," White says of his coach, Marcus Holmes. "I can call him anytime."

White joined The Grounds Guys in 2018 and is based in Gulf Breeze, Fla. His company has a 70 percent commercial and 30 percent residential client mix. The company focuses on lawn care, tree services, design and build, and more.



Matthew White

Bennett has a similar experience with NaturaLawn, noting all new franchisees have two years of full support to help them get established, whether that's visits to the franchisee's location or whatever is needed.

"(The company) invests a lot of time and money back into you," he says. "Not many companies do that."

FOLLOW THE PATH

"As long as you follow the system and do things the way they're supposed to be done, it's hard to fail," Laramie says. "This NaturaLawn system has been around for quite a while. They've made the mistakes; they've had the successes."

Franchisees say it's critical to follow these established systems created by the parent company, as tempting as it might be to deviate from what's been set out for lawn care professionals with an established business.

"When you get on as a franchisee, you have the rainbow, and if you don't follow everything, you won't get to the pot of gold," White says.

Schoot adds that it's important to be engaged and connected to the franchise. It's the reason lawn care professionals are investing in the franchise in the first place.

"When I first joined, I was the guy that paid for a name, I looked like a Grounds Guy, I was producing work like a Grounds Guy, I just wasn't really engaged and wasn't connected," he says. "Once I got engaged and connected with the system and the other owners, my business just continued to grow and grow."

The network of other franchisees is an invaluable resource for both new and established franchisees.

"We can call upon veterans that have been in the business for 30 or 40 years and ask them their opinion and experiences and learn from their mistakes and call upon them for their knowledge," Vidrine says.

Roberts agrees. "We're a small-knit group — there's probably 30 owners — we're like a big family," he says. "The best friends I have in this world are other franchise owners. We work with each other; we talk with each other." 📞



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Let's talk about grubs

Two lawn care operators discuss the strategies they use to control grubs

BY SARAH WEBB | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR



THATCH DWELLERS

Grubs feed on lawns' roots and live in the thatch layer.

Perhaps the most frustrating aspect of dealing with grubs is that they infest thick, healthy turf stands.

"Grubs eat the roots — they like thicker lawns because those are a better food source, and they live in the thatch," says Luke Hawthorne, owner of Emerald Lawns in Round Rock, Texas. "They're going to be looking for lawns that're taken care of, well watered and well fertilized."

Hawthorne and Rob Elder, president of Omaha Organics in Omaha, Neb., share their grub control approaches.

A PREVALENT PROBLEM

Within the past decade or so, grubs have become much more common in Emerald Lawns' service area.

"I think it's the moderate winters here, and we have so much growth, so there's a lot of lawns being put in, which is a much better food source," Hawthorne says. "The grubs don't stop feeding here because the seasons are so temperate. We barely have a hard freeze in the wintertime."

The \$12 million firm provides lawn and tree care services to a 90 percent residential, 10 percent commercial clientele.

The company typically spots damage in the spring once the grass is no longer dormant. The brown grub-damaged areas stand out against the green turf. Hawthorne says the grass feels spongy to walk on, and it's not attached to the soil very well.

To control the pests, Emerald Lawns technicians apply an insecticide with an active ingredient of chlorantraniliprole or imidacloprid once annually sometime between April or June.

The company also recommends scalping a lawn or cutting it a couple of inches shorter than normal and bagging or raking it after the first cut in the spring.

"Keeping that thatch layer to a minimum will help drastically cut down that grub population," Hawthorne says.

PHOTO: OMAHA ORGANICS

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ORGANIC OPTION

Omaha Organics, which provides 5 percent mowing and maintenance and 95 percent lawn care services to a 70 percent residential, 30 percent commercial clientele, takes an organic approach to contend with the pests.

First, the company takes a sample of each yard and puts it through a soil test to determine a yard's needs.

"We focus on every yard specifically as to what nutrients it needs," Elder says. "Instead of doing a nitrogen-phosphorous-potassium fertilizer, as in most chemical fertilizers, we'll do an organic program with lots of micronutrients, secondary nutrients and amino acids, along with the nitrogen-phosphorus-potassium."

The company also implements practices such as overseeding and aeration,


typically in the fall, to help build a healthy root and soil structure. For turf installs, it uses fescue because grub damage is less apparent. Upon request, the company will chemically treat a lawn with a product that has the active ingredient trichlorfon.

Elder stresses that Omaha Organics harbors an all-or-nothing attitude when it comes to taking on new customers.

"We don't take on customers unless they're going to do our plan," he says. "It's what we need to do to your yard, or your

yard is not going to get the best response."

To educate customers on the approach, Omaha Organic's website features more than 120 blogs on the products and services the company offers.

"We've made our website that detailed and informational because it almost became a full-time job educating people," Elder says. "(But) most of our customers come to us because they want an organic option, and there's really none in town other than us." 



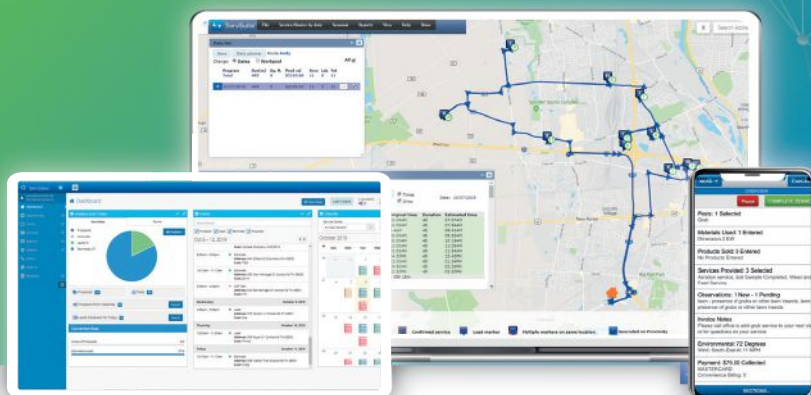
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MAINTENANCE SHOP

Add that truck

Lawn care operators share their advice for when to add a truck or van to their fleet

BY CLARA MCHUGH
LM MANAGING EDITOR



ALL ABOUT TIMING
Company growth or old vehicles may signal that it's time for a new fleet.



There comes a time in a lawn care company's life when it's time to expand the size of its fleet. It's important, however, to know when is the right time to add that truck or van to the business. Purchasing this equipment comes down to several factors: Do old fleet vehicles need replacing, and is the company growing?

Nate Moses, president of Precision Landscape Management in Greenville, N.C., knew it was time when he saw large amounts of growth in his company.

"We needed to grow our fleet in order to support our growth. We add one to two crews per year, and it is necessary to equip our crews with the right vehicles," Moses says.

The \$2.4 million company has a 90 percent residential and 10 percent commercial customer base and provides 40 percent design build,

30 percent maintenance and 30 percent lawn and shrub care services. Precision was founded about 10 years ago. Moses says it has experienced nothing but growth over the last decade.



Nate Moses

"Four years ago, we decided to get serious about growing the company rather than it just being an owner-operator thing," he says. "We realized we would have to invest in equipment, and we bought used equipment to stay debt-free."

That used equipment ended up costing the business a lot in repairs, and in order to sustain the growth of the company, Moses realized that he needed to grow the fleet.

According to Moses, the company's budget has increased for 2020, and it intends to add five vehicles to the fleet this year. There will be one sales car, one small pickup truck, one flatbed truck and two Isuzu cab-over trucks.

When the company adds a truck, van or sales car to its fleet, the intended use is for 10 years, but vehicles can be added to the fleet on an as-needed basis.

Moses says that when making the decision about whether to add a vehicle, LCOs should consider how that vehicle is going to be used.

"Precision believes that it is important to use a uniform fleet as much as possible, but our different divisions need different vehicles. We decide what type to use by looking at its intended daily use, the possibility of needing to be

used for other purposes, fuel economy, etc.," he says.

For example, the company uses Isuzu cab-over trucks and chooses Dodge Ram trucks when it needs a diesel option. For small pickup trucks, the company uses Chevy, and its sales cars are generally Subaru because the brand is environmentally friendly. "Since one of our core values is sustainability, that was a way to align our brand with that."

KNOW WHEN YOU NEED

There are several factors that can indicate when it is time to expand a fleet.

"Growth of revenue should be one telltale sign, but be sure that it is profitable growth," Moses says. "You should have benchmarks for what your crews can produce, and when your projected revenue for a year indicates that you will need to add a crew, you should also be planning and budgeting for the tools that each crew needs."

Moses also says that another indicator that a company may need to add a new vehicle is if the existing vehicles are costing too much to repair. "Multiple four-figure repairs in a year could be a sign that your vehicle isn't the best fit for your crew. If you are down a vehicle,

Continued on page 32



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MAINTENANCE SHOP



A UNIFORM FLEET

A uniform fleet is important, but sometimes
company owners may choose to purchase
different vehicles for different uses.

Continued from page 30

you are also losing revenue, so you need to ensure that your crews have reliable equipment.”

According to Jeff Smith from Neely Coble, a commercial truck dealership based in Nashville, Tenn., there are a few things to know before adding or replacing a vehicle in a fleet.

Smith cautions LCOs against investing money in a vehicle that they could never get back out of it if they had to sell it. He also says that once a vehicle has fully depreciated and is out of warranty, it is best to replace the vehicle, since owners could end up investing money in repairing that vehicle that they could never recoup.

Smith adds that when a lawn care operator is ready to expand his or her fleet, he or she should be sure to look at the annual mileage for the vehicle.

“This will help answer the question as to whether or not they should go with a gas or a diesel engine,” Smith explains. “In most cases, you will need to drive the vehicle 25,000 miles or more a year to start seeing the payback for the added cost of diesel.”

He also advises that buyers consider how heavy of a gross vehicle weight rating or gross combined weight rating the vehicle might need. This information also might influence what type of drivetrain will be necessary, he adds.

Monique Allen, CEO and creative director at The Garden Continuum in Medfield, Mass., explains that there are three things that indicate it’s time to expand a fleet.

“It’s an amalgam of three tracked factors: debt-to-equity ratio, repair and service cost and crew expansion and development. These factors help us make sound asset expansion and management decisions so we can stay lean and nimble.”

Jacob Cavazos, co-owner of JC3 Lawn and Landscape in Weslaco, Texas, says that this spring, the company plans to add another vehicle to its fleet. Some of the major factors



he is considering are overtime and the abundance of work coming into the company.

"All of my crews are busting at the seams with work and average around 45 hours a week," he says. "We also have been steady with work in our local market and at times, have had to turn work away. We currently have really low debt and are in a good financial position to continue to grow our business in 2020."

HOW TO BUY

When considering adding a vehicle to a fleet, it is also important to consider whether to buy, rent or lease the vehicle.


"As far as lease versus purchase, that is a decision for the accountant to decide and usually comes down to a tax decision," Smith says. "Leasing can lower your monthly payment and help with cash flow of a startup business, but at some point, the residual is still due; therefore, you must plan for that."

Smith says pre-owned vehicles are a good option for startup companies, but he adds that owners should ensure they're purchasing mechanically sound vehicles. He notes that the downside to pre-owned vehicles is the higher interest rate and shorter finance terms.

"If you are purchasing a new vehicle, I highly recommend that you run it for

at least two years to overcome the initial depreciation when you drive it off the lot," he says.

Buying new is the preferred method for Precision Landscape Management.

According to Moses, the benefit of cheaper financing allows the company to keep good cash flow, and the warranty that comes with new vehicles is a huge benefit. 



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COMPANY Monarch Landscape Cos. – Terracare Associates

DETAILS Terracare Associates partnered with the Arapahoe Park and Recreation District in 2017 through a standard bidding process. Since then, it has managed the maintenance of the district's 14 parks, 14 miles of trails and 300 acres of open space, which are spread throughout multiple cities.

To ensure such a large area is well maintained, Terracare has a staff dedicated to the parks district and appointed an area manager who was familiar with the site, which minimized learning curves.

The district is heavily trafficked by guests and requires constant upkeep to overcome the amount of foot traffic it receives.

To avoid doing enhancements and maintenance in the parks when they were being heavily used, crews performed work during downtimes, when the parks and surrounding facilities had fewer visitors.

The company uses John Deere mowers to maintain grassy areas, such as athletic fields, small turf areas and large native areas. A John Deere Gator is used for repair work in parks and open spaces.

The project earned Terracare a 2019 Silver Award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence program.

See more photos from this project at [LandscapeManagement.net/thebigone](https://www.LandscapeManagement.net/thebigone).



PHOTOS: BRYAN GRANT, PEXIL STUDIO PHOTOGRAPHY



Captions | **1.** This project consists of various sporting fields that are used throughout the year. **2.** Roses follow the visitors as they walk along the sidewalk. **3.** This flower and plant bed welcomes guests into the popular Trails Recreation Center. **4.** This project's sports fields are maintained, in part, with the help of John Deere mowers and Gators. **5.** Located at the entrance of the facility, colorful plant material welcomes guests in. **6.** The team implemented a variety of vibrant flowers and plants near the main facility.

EXPERTS' TIPS

Zero-Turn Mowers

↓ SCOPE IT OUT
Taking time to understand an area's conditions can help prevent mistakes.



Common operator mistakes and how to prevent them

In their constant pursuit of job site efficiency, maintenance crews shouldn't lose sight of the fact that safety and quality are equally important. To that end, even the most seasoned zero-turn mower operators need a refresher training from time to time — especially after a long off-season.

"Operators should keep an eye on their tires," says Roger Beale, a branch manager for Greenscape in the Raleigh, N.C., market. "If operators are noticing water and mud, they are likely causing landscape damage. They should stop mowing and assess what is going on. And, if they ever get stuck, they should be trained to back the mower up as opposed to powering it forward."

Knowing one's working conditions is also important. Certain mower accessories make knowing the surroundings even more important. At

Greenscape, operators pay special attention to rear-mounted debris catchers, which can lengthen a zero-turn mower by as much as one-third.

"Since our operators are used to mowing without a catcher, they can forget how to make turns," Beale says. "Every fall, when we put the catching systems on, we have a training session. We set up an obstacle course with safety cones to let our operators practice."

Rollover protection system (ROPS) bars can create similar operator issues. Beale says Greenscape employees are continually reminded to account for the full height of the mower — ROPS included — when attempting to mow under trees and other obstacles.

Speaking of ROPS, some operators like to collapse them so they don't have to worry about mowing under trees. But as Beale points out, "The manu-

facturers put them on for a reason."

Ivan Giraldo, president of Clean Scapes based in Austin, Texas, couldn't agree more. His equipment managers install bolts in place of the standard safety pins, preventing operators from collapsing the ROPS.

Clean Scapes also takes steps to minimize mower wear and tear.

"We train our employees to avoid curbs when possible, looking for a sidewalk entrance into the turf area instead," Giraldo says. "It is important for leadership to stress the importance of this because operators are also trying to do their jobs efficiently and not waste time."

That is because productivity, safety and quality must always go hand in hand.

Experts from four zero-turn mower manufacturers offer some additional insights on the common mistakes zero-turn mower operators make. **19**

EXMARK

Mike Mayfield

Product manager

One mistake we see landscape professionals make is basing purchase decisions on price alone. Efficiency, productivity, operator comfort, durability and total cost of ownership are equally important factors. Contractors should consult with their local dealership to explore the features and options that make the most sense in each application. The right mower will allow an operator to finish jobs faster, easier and more profitably. Because of this, the increased upfront costs are paid back with interest over the life of the mower. The last time a contractor worries about purchase price is when they sign the purchase agreement. From that moment on, the focus shifts to productivity, efficiency and making money. That's where you see the value of choosing the right mower for the job.



HUSQVARNA

George Reister

Global product manager - ZTR

All professionals know it is important to sharpen blades on a regular schedule, but many forget that it is also critical to check tire pressure on all four tires. A partially flat tire will throw off the pitch and level of the deck, resulting in an uneven cut. On that note, always recheck deck pitch and level after a tire change or other major repair. With new operators, it is best to start off their training on pavement. When they can maneuver confidently at the right speed without squealing the tires, they are ready for grass. This helps ensure that they have learned to avoid "dead sticking" turns. Holding the inside tire while still turning is the primary cause of turf damage for newbies.



JOHN DEERE

Ruben Peña

Product marketing manager

One common mistake zero-turn operators make is mowing at a machine's top transport speed. Operators should mow at a speed that is appropriate for the length of grass being cut, the landscape and the conditions. This is especially important when mulching. Another common mistake is choosing the wrong height of cut. Most machines have a cut height range of 1 to 5 inches. This range allows operators to adjust for various factors such as grass type, mowing conditions, mowing speed and seasonality. By performing all manufacturer-suggested routine machine maintenance, mowing at an appropriate speed and selecting the right height of cut, operators can improve overall cut quality and enhance their productivity.



KUBOTA

Tom Vachal

Senior turf product manager

There are two key things commercial cutters should focus on in the beginning of the season. The first is to make sure all equipment is ready by doing things like adding fresh fluids, inspecting belts for failure points and verifying that all switches are working properly. The second is to ensure that employees are trained properly. Hold a session with all new employees to make sure they know how to operate and perform simple inspections on all equipment. Also, let both new and returning employees know how your company operates and what the expectations are. These employees will be your brand ambassadors, and their work is a direct reflection of your company. This is important because the competition for customers is getting more difficult.



BUSINESS BOOSTERS

Working with dealers

How to build a successful dealer relationship

BY SARAH WEBB
LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

When it comes to finding and holding on to the right dealer, there are several things landscape professionals should keep in mind — beyond knowing if dealers stock quality and innovative products.

Landscape Management spoke to Pat Lyons, owner of Pat's Power Equipment in Charlestown, R.I., and Curtis Smith, owner and president of C. Smith and Son Farm Equipment in Clyde, Texas, to get the dealers' perspectives on cultivating a working relationship between landscape professionals and dealers.

C. Smith and Son Farm Equipment provides landscape professionals with Kioti tractors, UTVs and zero-turn mowers. Lyons and his father started the business in 1975 and mostly served farmers until about 15 years ago. It has

been a million-dollar Kioti dealership every year since 2008.

Pat's Power Equipment has served as a Ferris dealer for 24 years and is one of the oldest Ferris dealers in the country, according to Lyons. It provides landscape pros with Ferris mowers, blowers and spreader-sprayers, among other products.

1. KNOWLEDGEABLE STAFF

Because landscape professionals often turn to their dealers with equipment questions and servicing needs, it's important that the dealership and its employees are educated on the equipment they offer.

Events, demos and various educational seminars often help dealers stay up to date on the equipment.

"When we order something, we end up schooling ourselves," Smith says. "We own all of the equipment ourselves, so we do the landscaping at our personal houses with the same equipment that we sell. We know our equipment."

2. CUSTOMER SUPPORT

Quality service and equipment support are other factors landscape pros should look for in a dealer, according to Lyons.

"It's about a solid reputation and the ability to provide a positive working relationship built on trust," Lyons says. "It's having an expert service department with a well-stocked parts department."

EQUIPMENT EXPERTS
Often, dealers serve as the go-to source for equipment questions.



LITTLE DOWNTIME

When dealers have equipment repaired on time, it helps landscape pros get back on the job.

One way Pat's Power Equipment has demonstrated customer support, Lyons says, is by explaining the benefits of suspension and then selling several units with suspension to customers who experience back pain.


Smith adds that the family-owned aspect of his company helps contribute to building strong customer relationships.

"When you talk to someone here, it's not a salesman you're ever going to talk to; it's an owner of the business," he says. "Everything is a lot more personal to us than it would be if you had an employee who doesn't have at stake what we have at stake."

3. TIMELINESS

For C. Smith and Son, servicing equipment after the sale in a timely fashion is also a priority.

"If you can't do that for them, you won't see them again," Smith says. "That's our goal, and that's why we're going to take care of those people. If I was going to look for somebody to buy any type of equipment from, I would want to know that the service is what the service should be."

Other important questions for landscape pros to ask, according to Lyons, include: Is the dealer able to meet the landscapers' needs with inventory, expert service, warranty and parts support? How long has the dealer been in business, and what is the dealership's reputation? Does the dealer offer competitive financing programs? Does the dealer have a loaner or demo program? 





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COMPANY Plants Creative Landscapes

DETAILS The homeowners discussed investing in a second home, a retreat outside of the city. However, upon meeting with the Plants Creative Landscapes team, they realized they could have the retreat they desired in their own backyard.

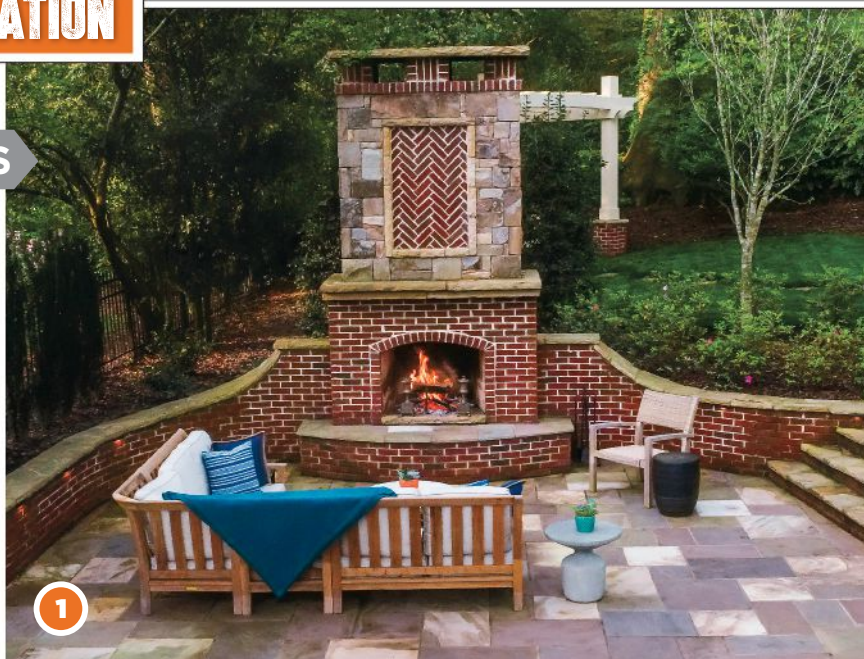
Matching the wall brick with the existing brick on the 90-year-old home took time and special research. The site's topography and water runoff management were also challenges. This property is situated on an incline, which required thoughtful design to manage the water traveling from the back of the property toward the home. The company used Bobcat skid-steers and Toro Dingo mini skid-steers for the leveling, grading and dirt moving on the job site.

Pam Dooley, owner of Plants Creative Landscapes, says the project was referred to the company from Alair Homes Decatur, a longtime partner. "We're always a good match for them on projects, so they introduced us to the homeowners, and the rest was history," Dooley says.

Permeable gravel was used on walkways and the dining patio surface. A new drainage systems behind the brick walls minimized the amount of water to be captured and released. The crew regraded and created a new third terrace level, helping slow water flow and creating a perfect spot for an outdoor bed swing.

The project earned Plants Creative Landscapes a 2019 Silver Award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence program.

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



PHOTOS: JOEL HORDYK, CAMERON STREET PHOTOGRAPHY; PLANTS CREATIVE LANDSCAPES (BEFORE PICTURES)



Captions | **1.** A custom stone and brick fireplace creates a strong focal point from the back of the home. The fireplace also provides privacy for the bed swing tucked away behind it. **2.** An aerial view of the backyard, showing how the spaces are connected, transitioning from the grilling and dining area and leading to the fireplace seating with the bed swing tucked away in the upper backyard. **3.** A shot of crews removing the railroad tie walls and steps. **4.** A combination of wall and path lights provides safe access between spaces and highlight unique plant selections like European hornbeams, contorted filberts and dwarf bald cypress trees. **5.** A before view from the back of the home, prior to construction. **6.** A combination of prostrate rosemary and yellow abelia, with a pop of color provided by the red weeping Japanese maple on the corner, provides color and textural interest and soften the patio edges. **7.** Before the renovation, the backyard was retained with railroad tie walls, while rotten steps led to the upper lawn area. **8.** Matching the brick on the home and existing carport columns proved to be challenging, but the Plants Creative Landscapes team came pretty close.


INSTALLATION IRON

The scoop on skid-steers

Why the skid-steer is a valuable and versatile workhorse BY ABBY HART | LM SENIOR EDITOR

When it comes to landscape construction equipment, contractors look to get the most out of their machines, making skid-steer loaders (SSLs) a popular purchase. Skid-steers are a common choice for flat terrain and hard surface applications, including landscaping, site preparation, earthmoving and demolition, according to Lee Padgett, product manager at Takeuchi US.

“As more and more hydraulic attachments are being offered, larger and higher-horsepower machines with high-flow auxiliary circuits offer a more versatile machine with higher return on investment,” Padgett says.

Here are a few more points of interest for those looking to add skid-steers to their equipment fleet. 



Lee Padgett

A NOTE ABOUT MINI SKID-STEERS

Brett Newendorp, landscape market manager at Vermeer, explains that mini skid-steers can be a useful addition to a company's fleet. “A compact size gives mini skid-steers the ability to turn in very tight quarters, and contractors should be aware of the various sizes and weights of machines as they look for a mini skid-steer.” Depending on their trailer, attachments and other loads, contractors can select a mini skid that best fits their trailering configuration. Other factors to look at are length and width.

Depending on a job site's tolerance, choosing the right mini skid-steer can help a contractor lift more material into a tighter site or go places that many larger loaders cannot.



Brett Newendorp

Skid-steers offer either radial lift or vertical lift designs. Radial lift designs are recommended for operators who perform more grading and dirt work. According to Padgett, these operators prefer radial lift because it generally has greater bucket breakout force and lift arm forces. Radial lift machines also have excellent midheight reach due to their lift path. Vertical lift is optimal for operators who primarily perform load and carry work and truck loading. Vertical lift has a higher rated operating capacity and better reach at full dump height.

SSLs allow operators versatility with the ability to use a wide array of attachments. They work well in tandem with other machines like compact excavators, says Padgett. Brett Newendorp, landscape market manager at Vermeer, explains that skid-steer attachments can include a leveler attachment to prep the job site, a vibratory plow attachment to pull in landscape lighting wiring, a landscape grapple attachment for placing blocks or trencher attachments for installing irrigation systems.



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INSTALLATION SOLUTIONS

Clean cuts

Design/build contractors share the saws that help get construction jobs done

BY ABBY HART | LM SENIOR EDITOR

Landscape construction contractors need powerful tools that can handle a variety of cutting jobs. Jeff Cartwright, owner of Cartwright Landscaping, based in Henrico, Va., has a few saws that he considers vital parts of his construction arsenal. Cartwright Landscaping does 50 percent design and installation work, mostly high-end residential, as well as maintenance and irrigation.

Michael Burdett, construction operations manager at Plants Creative Landscapes in Atlanta, a \$4 million residential-only company that does \$2.2 million in design/build work, advises keeping current with Occupational Safety and Health Administration guidelines when training crew members on saw safety. Here's the equipment that Cartwright's and Burdett's teams use on the job.

A solid cut-off saw. Cartwright has Stihl TS 500 and Stihl TS 700 models in his shop, both of which handle thicker stones such as marble, slate and porcelain. "They're great with any projects we're doing with hardscaping, pavers, bluestone and any kind of natural stone," he says. "If we have to cut concrete, because of the depth of the blade (5 inches), we can get a really nice, deep, clean cut."

An all-purpose chainsaw. "We don't do tree work in-house, but when

we do demo work and need to clear tree limbs and smaller trees, we use a Stihl MS 250 chainsaw," Burdett says.

A lightweight battery-powered saw. Cartwright recommends a lighter, battery-powered saw for quick cuts or for jobs such as cutting metal edging to contain rocks in a walkway or mulch in planting beds. "We have a Stihl TSA 230 for smaller jobs, like cutting a few bricks," he says. "It's easy to put in the trunk or the back seat, and (a bigger saw) can be an access issue if you're in tight spaces. When we've used it, we've never run out of a charge or strength, and it's consistent in the power it delivers."

Cartwright Landscaping uses a variety of battery-powered tools for construction as well as maintenance work, including battery-powered hedge trimmers and pruners. To avoid misplacing tools, Cartwright keeps the company's battery-powered equipment, extra batteries and chargers in his office and staff signs them out.

A concrete-cutting saw. For tougher jobs like cutting concrete, marble and porcelain, Cartwright recommends a heavy-duty saw and preferably a tool with a water hookup. "Any time you start to get into marble and porcelain, you definitely want water on the respective cuts," he says.

"There's just so much heat generated when you're cutting." He's rented the Stihl GS 461 Rock Boss from a local rental company and was impressed with the results on jobs such as cutting through an existing cinderblock wall. Burdett's crews use a concrete and masonry cut-off saw, the Stihl 14-inch TS 420, on brick and block.

A masonry saw. For big masonry projects, such as large hardscape jobs and permeable pavers, Plants Creative Landscapes uses the iQ Dust Control masonry saw. "We don't use it all the time — we only have one, and we keep it on a special tool checkout basis with our staff — but it does a good job of keeping the silica dust down."

Cartwright's construction teams typically have two saws on a job site in case a saw malfunctions or different saw blades are required in order to cut harder stone. He suggests demoing saws before buying them when possible and having operators get comfortable with using them on a variety of materials.

"I'd say use six or seven pieces (of stone) and try different cuts, like a corner cut or curve cut," he says, noting that veinage, striation and different pressures will affect how the saw and blades handle the material. 📌



SAW SELECTION
Cartwright suggests a powerful cut-off saw for concrete, hardscaping, pavers, bluestone and any natural stone.



Michael Burdett



Jeff Cartwright

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BUSINESS BOOSTERS

To the drawing board

Design professionals share their favorite landscape design software

BY CLARA MCHUGH
LM MANAGING EDITOR

With the rise of design software, fewer people are designing landscapes by hand. Nowadays, designers turn to their computers or tablets as often as they turn to the actual drawing board to complete design projects for clients.

LM asked a few designers from across the country to tell us what their favorite design software is and why.

TARA VEROTSKY

Landscape design and sales

DeSantis Landscapes • Portland, Ore.

“For those who have been hand drafters and want an easy-to-learn software, I would recommend Pro Landscape by Drafrix Software.

Pro Landscape has basic tools to institute your landscape designs online. You can consolidate the plant palette to suit your needs, and it beats erasing and redrawing when you have revisions.

For more professional landscape design, AutoCAD is the universal, industry standard software. It’s proficient and has the ability to interface with architectural drawings.

I started using Pro Landscape when I took a position doing small-scale designs for a local Portland nursery, Al’s Garden Center. It was design on the fly for homeowners who wanted ideas to



take with them through the nursery to influence their plant purchases.

AutoCAD is what is offered at most universities that teach landscape architecture. This software has been around since the mid-’80s and has managed to evolve with the progression of technology. With a large range of professionals using this software, there is a lot of money available to improve it.”

DAVID BURTON

Landscape design and sales

di Stefano Landscaping • Jericho, Vt.

“Vectorworks with Landmark is the design software that I have been using since 2005. I was first introduced to this software when I was working for Doerler Landscapes in Yardville, N.J. I used this software because in comparison to others on the market, the presentation graphics were more attractive and gave a hand-rendered appearance.

As I learned the software’s capabilities, we started to see how it could be used to generate planting schedules and takeoff worksheets to aid in estimating and providing planting lists for proposals.

It is a very robust tool, and I imagine I only use a fraction of what it is actually capable of. I find it helpful to produce accurate drawings that are easy to revise and can provide lots of useful information. Over the years, the developers have made some great strides to make the 3D presentations photo realistic. Some of my easiest and

largest sales have been backed with 3D rendering that communicated the design intent and really helped the client envision themselves enjoying the space.

The software is not the easiest to pick up and definitely takes some effort to learn. Vectorworks has classes available that I took, which helped get me up and running. The learning curve is high, but the payoff, if a designer will stick with it, is significant.”

JOSH ROBINSON

Design and sales manager

Todd’s Services • Hamburg, Mich.

“We use two types of software, but it depends on the type of print we’re doing. For 75 percent of them, it would be Real-time Landscaping Pro. It is simple to use compared to others. It has fast rendering times, and it’s easier to teach others.

We found it by talking to people in the industry. What interested me was the efficiencies that it would give us while maintaining good quality 3D imaging. Those efficiencies would be the fast rendering, the shorter training cycle and faster 3D creation.

The other software that we use is AutoCAD with Google SketchUp. If we have a print that is highly technical, then we have to go to AutoCAD.

No matter what you’re using, it’s important to always keep your options open and see what’s new and coming so you stay on the cutting edge of technology.”

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WATER WORLD

Sustainable 'scapes

LOCATION Tigard, Ore.

COMPANY Pacific Landscape Management

DETAILS The Village at Summer Creek, a 125-unit homeowners' association (HOA), needed a facelift for its turf areas and irrigation system in the name of sustainability. Pacific Landscape Management (PLM) started by reducing the small turf panels throughout the community.

Over the course of three weeks, team members worked on the project, converting half of the lawn areas into garden beds, rejuvenating the remaining turf and planting easy-care plants. The team members noticed the irrigation system was damaged during turf removal.

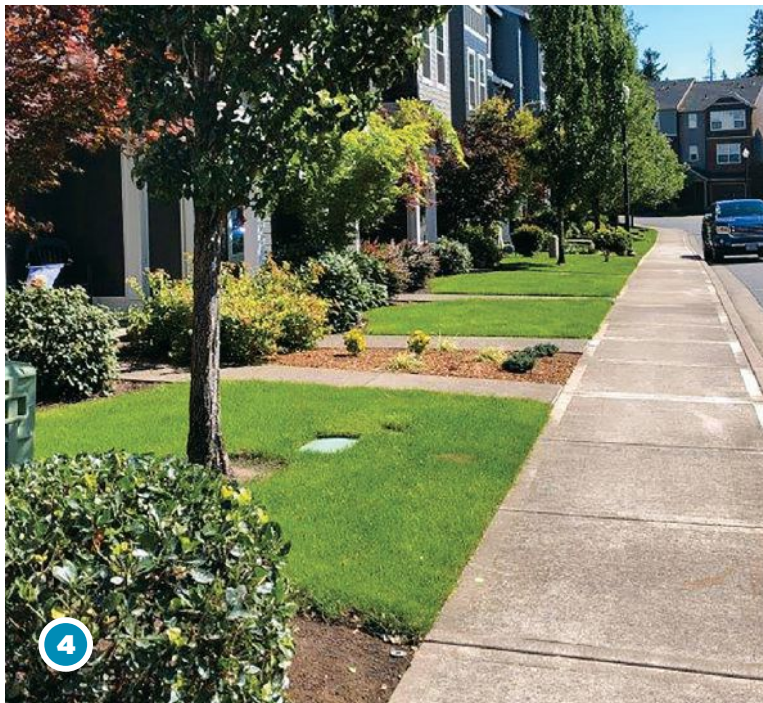
"We found so many items that were broken that the community didn't even know about," says Octavio Gonzalez, HOA account manager for PLM. "The community just thought they had a big water bill each season."

The team also discovered the irrigation system was a mix of dripline irrigation and sprayheads. Plus, plants were being overwatered, and sprinklers were overshooting their targets.

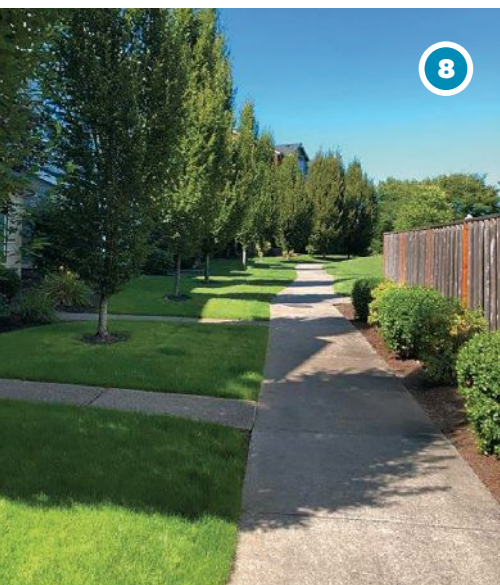
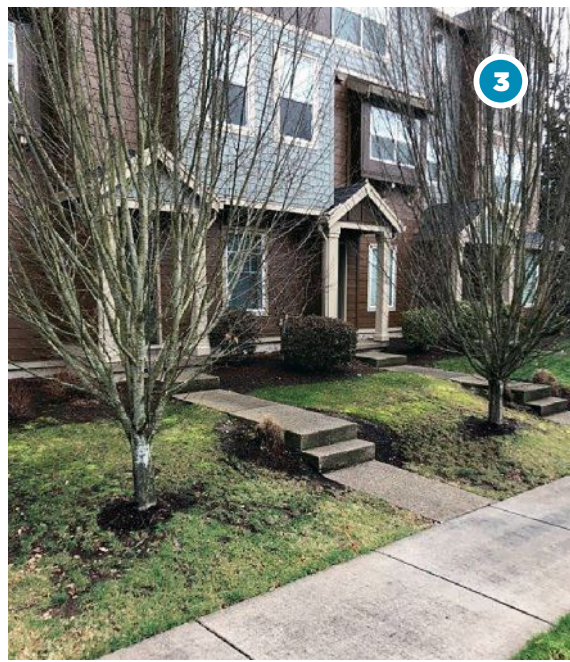
"We had to make dedicated garden bed zones with their own watering times, and separate the grass zones and have them watered appropriately," Gonzalez says.

The next phase will take place over a three-year period and will involve boring new wire and connecting individual zones and valves; wiring all the valves together; and installing a Weathermatic controller as the central irrigation controller.

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



PHOTOS: OCTAVIO GONZALEZ, PACIFIC LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT



Captions | **1.** Pacific Landscape Management took on the project at The Village at Summer Creek with the goals of sustainability and conservation top of mind. **2.** Easy-to-maintain plants replaced large portions of the turf areas. **3.** Before Pacific Landscape Management undertook the project, many of the sprayheads missed their targets, such as the turf pictured here, and instead sprayed sidewalks and driveways. **4.** Turf areas are mixed in with other plant areas, and the irrigation system is zoned accordingly. **5.** Because it was not properly managed, many of the turf areas prior to the renovation were in bad condition. **6.** A playground in the HOA boasts healthy turf after sustainable practices were employed by Pacific Landscape Management. **7.** Sustainable beds such as this one help minimize the amount of turf areas that need to be maintained. **8.** Following the renovation, many of the community's turf areas are smaller and more manageable.

Where the irrigation industry is headed

One young professional relays his journey in the irrigation industry so far

BY SARAH WEBB | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

At the 2019 Irrigation Show, *LM* sat with a few (relatively) new faces to the industry during the Young Professionals Breakfast to see where the industry is headed.

Olin Unruh, 28, owner and CEO of Wetlands Irrigation in McPherson, Kan., discussed what he's encountered so far in his 10 years of working in the industry. Wetlands Irrigation is a \$650,000 organization that provides 80 percent irrigation and 20 percent turf and ornamental services to a 75 percent residential, 25 percent commercial clientele. The company currently has six employees.

What initially drew you to the irrigation industry?

"I wanted to go into business for myself, and this was an opportunity that came up at that time."

Were there any challenges you faced as you became familiar with the industry?

"I had to learn everything from customer relations to the work of adjusting sprinkler heads to designing sprinkler systems and everything that goes along with it. It was a learning curve that I had to overcome.

The most challenging aspect is probably the accounting side, the office work, the billing and maintaining accounts and cash flow. As a young person going into business, that wasn't really my strong point. The past year, I've been dialing in on the business side of it and realizing that's just as important as having techs in the field getting the work done."

What are the issues facing the irrigation industry right now?

"In central Kansas, the biggest challenge is just educating the public on the best ways to use water in the most responsible ways. We're in a place where water is pretty cheap, and the majority of my customers overwater. Educating them on proper watering techniques is one of the challenges I face here.

As part of our 2020 social media campaign, I want to start offering weekly or monthly tips to those who follow us or send a newsletter out to our customers outlining good watering techniques and general water requirements of a fescue lawn here. We are also trying to market and sell smart controllers that have some capabilities to adjust on their own."

What do you get out of attending events such as the Irrigation Show?


"The classes I attended were primarily business-focused classes, and I got a lot of good information about pricing in our industry and good techniques of overhead recovery.

The networking was a big benefit. I met a lot of people there that I think I'll continue to learn from. I can ask them questions as I go forward. The networking was what drew me to the Young Professionals Breakfast."

What are your goals for 2020? Do you have a plan to achieve those?

"Our plan in 2020 is to increase our advertising. The last couple years, we haven't done any advertising other than word of mouth. We have some adjacent towns that we are hoping to get a presence in this next year and then spend a couple days a week in those areas. Our expansion plan is to hire two to three new technicians in the coming year."

What advice do you have for other young irrigation professionals?

"Make sure the business is profitable from the get-go. Don't just assume that because the phone is ringing and there's lots of work to do that you're making money. Make sure you're charging correctly and getting paid on time and keeping up with the things in the office so those don't end up holding you back. That's a lot of what's kept me from growing as much as opportunity would've allowed." 

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FIVE QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Dwight Bizzell

VICE PRESIDENT
BIZZELL NURSERY CO.
SIKESTON, MO.

1 Tell me about Bizzell Nursery Co. and how you got involved?

I'm the third generation. Bizzell Lawn Care was started by my grandfather, Walter, in the late '60s, early '70s. He worked three jobs — he worked for the post office during the day, delivering letters; he delivered flowers after he got off work; when he got done with that, he would go house to house trimming shrubs. In 1980, my dad started the nursery business. In 2014, I came back to Sikeston, and after a year or two of learning the business, I took over the spraying business. My grandfather passed away seven years ago. He wanted to work until he died, and he fulfilled that dream.

2 What do you and (wife) Sheila like to do for fun?

We like to travel, and we travel a lot. We like seeing our friends in southwest Missouri or traveling to see friends in Indiana, North Carolina, Florida ... we've been to Jamaica ... the moment we get off on Friday night, we're on the go. My favorite place is the Great Smoky Mountains. There's nothing better. The air is cleaner up there, and it's so peaceful.

3 What do you foresee as an important trend in the industry that we should all be keeping our eyes on?

Obviously, it's technology and how it's making a huge jump. Any expo, any conference you go to, there's a huge uproar in technology. It all circulates around people trying to pinpoint this efficiency problem with employees. We're all struggling, in what is a blue-collar industry, getting people to hold a shovel, get in equipment, building things. We're all struggling in the industry to find good, quality helpers. You can pay well, and they're still not coming around as frequently as they did. I think a big thing that's going to

happen in the next five years is as many autonomous things as possible. From communication with customers to mowers, technology is making a huge leap in our industry, and it's crazy to me that it's just now starting in the 21st century.

4 What's the strangest thing you've ever seen while out working?

I was out spreading one day, and I came up on a tree row down this path. On the other side of the tree row was literally a pasture full of camels. I came upon some guy who was raising camels. We don't have those kinds of animals out here; I didn't know that they even liked our climate.

5 You're a St. Louis Blues fan ... how big of a fan are you, and did you ever think they'd win the Stanley Cup?

I'm not as big a fan as my lead technician. His room is blue, he has Blues stickers all over his truck, and I haven't asked him, but I bet you he has a Blues tattoo somewhere. Over the past couple seasons, he's turned me into a fan. And to answer your question, no, I never thought they'd win it all. It was a Cinderella story, from last place to first place! We've never had the big names in hockey ... it was a true team effort. It was awesome. Missouri is very prideful in supporting its teams. 🍷

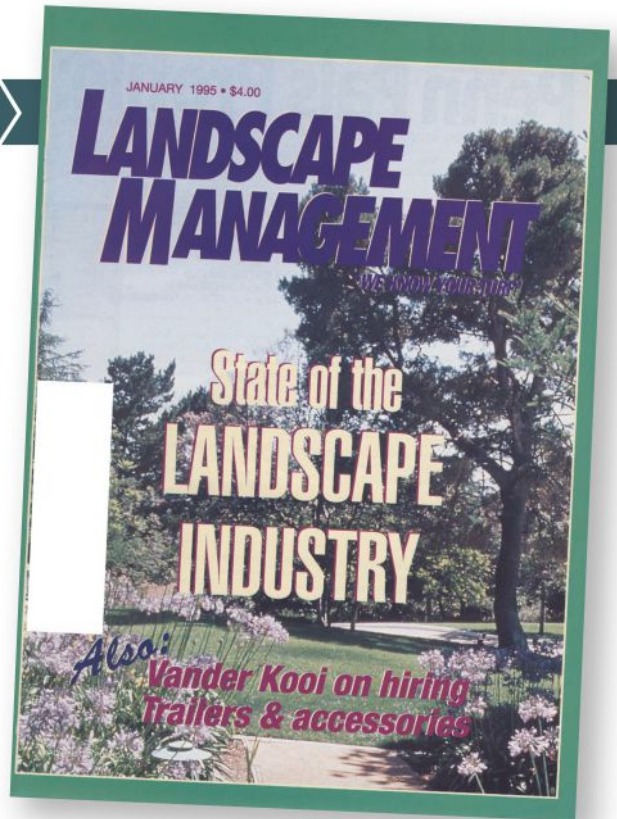
BEST ADVICE

"When you find a problem, provide options. And when you find that problem, don't just find it — help solve it."



PHOTO: LOU FERRARO, PARK SOUTH PHOTOGRAPHY

A LOOK BACK



Up for the challenge

In this article from the January 1995 issue of *Landscape Management*, Warren Brown, a vehicle and grounds manager, discusses the challenge of caring for the facilities at John Knox Village in Lee's Summit, Mo., the largest retirement complex in America at the time. The design of the facility meant that crews were often working in tight spaces and used zero-turn mowers to reduce the hours required for maintenance operations. What is the most challenging project your company has completed and how did you overcome those challenges? Tweet us at [@Landscapemgmt](https://twitter.com/Landscapemgmt) and let us know.

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BY KEVIN KEHOE

The author is managing partner of The Aspire Software Co. Reach him at kevin.kehoe@youraspire.com.

The path to 12 percent net profit

I recently conducted a benchmarking webinar with Greg Herring sponsored by my company, The Aspire Software Co. The results were interesting and distressingly familiar. Less than 20 percent of the respondents (52 companies) had net profit greater than 10 percent. The benchmark for excellence is 12 percent. Therefore, this first of several columns is about how to get started on the path to 12 percent.

Warning: you cannot simply look at an income statement line by cost line to figure out how to get there. To do that, you must understand the critical key productivity indicators (KPIs). These show you where to improve and how much an improvement will add to net profit. That's because net profit is a function of productivity. Productivity is a simple input-output investment ratio. The ratio tells you how good you are at turning an input into an output — and determining whether you're getting a max return on that investment.

There are three KPIs that matter because they are where you make your biggest investments: labor, over-

head and equipment. I would add a fourth — technology. The level of technology investment industrywide is so low that any investment can potentially achieve an enormous return. Think about it. From a cost-of-sale perspective, you spend +/-35 percent on labor, +/-14 percent on equipment and +/-40 percent on overhead of which the vast majority is people (management, sales and administrative related). You have to understand if each of these is paying off for you and where you must improve to drive the bottom line.

DEFINITIONS

Let's define the calculation of these KPIs so you can evaluate them tonight in your office and compare them to the benchmarks.

Labor KPI: Realize rate divided by wage rate.

Realize rate = Revenue minus materials and subcontractor expense divided by the labor hours.

Wage rate = Payroll dollars divided by payroll hours; includes the payroll taxes.

Overhead KPI: Revenue divided by overhead dollars.

Overhead = everything that is not cost of goods sold.

Equipment KPI: Revenue divided by net equipment dollars.

Net Equipment = cost of equipment minus straight-line depreciation.

Please note there are service line and regional differences in these numbers. That is why I am dedicating my next three columns to the details of the calculation, comparisons and benchmarks for each KPI. What will *not* be different is *how* to achieve the higher KPI score.

Why does all this matter? Simply because this Trump good-time economy will not last forever — these things never do. In my 30 years in the industry, I have lived through three significant pullbacks. So now is the time to focus and invest wisely and make the tough decisions that will carry you through the bad times and have you emerge strong for the next run-up.

In my next column, I'll cover the labor KPI and how to maximize it. 

Example

Income statement				KPIs			Benchmark
Sales/revenue	\$ 3,000,000			Labor KPI = Realize rate/wage rate			
Labor	\$ 1,200,000	40.0%		\$ 34.67	\$ 16.00	2.17	2.50
Materials/subs	\$ 400,000	13.3%		<i>Realize rate</i>	<i>Wage rate</i>	<i>Ratio</i>	
Gross profit	\$ 1,400,000	46.7%		Overhead KPI = Revenue/overhead			
Overhead	\$ 1,250,000	41.7%		\$ 3,000,000	\$ 1,250,000	2.40	2.60
Net profit	\$ 150,000	5.0%		<i>Revenue</i>	<i>Overhead</i>	<i>Ratio</i>	
BALANCE SHEET				Equipment KPI = Revenue/net equipment			
Equipment purchase cost	\$ 1,000,000			\$ 3,000,000	\$ 400,000	7.50	8.50
Depreciation	\$ 600,000			<i>Revenue</i>	<i>Net equipment ratio</i>		
Net equipment	\$ 400,000						
PAYROLL							
Hours	75,000						



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7 drivers for success in 2020



BY JEFFREY SCOTT

The author is owner of Jeffrey Scott Consulting, which helps landscape companies grow and maximize profits. Reach him at jeff@jeffreyscott.biz.

To ensure dramatic success for your lawn, landscape, tree or irrigation business this year, it helps to perform a look back at the last 12 months to see what worked well and what didn't.

It can be overwhelming to look at every detail, so focus on the key drivers that will give you a competitive edge. Here are seven of them. They require an honest assessment by you and your team for you to build a productive road map for this coming year.

1 Culture of winning. What were your company's biggest successes last year, and how did you celebrate as a team? Did you spend more time celebrating or correcting behavior? A winning team is infectious and helps you recruit A players. The good vibe starts with you as the owner.

2 Green light customers. How much time did your sales team spend with green light customers? And how much time did they spend (or waste) with shoppers, misfits and

red light customers? Your firm is not in the business of providing estimates. The purpose of your business is to build relationships and provide solutions for clients who believe what you believe and want what you sell.

3 Champion leadership team. Did your team give you energy and free up your time? Or did members of your team create extra work for you and sap your motivation? Championship companies are led by champion leadership teams where each player is an expert in his or her area, and the team uses brutal honesty to hammer out issues and develop solutions to keep your company growing forward.


4 A deeper bench. Did you sufficiently invest in training up your No. 2 employees at all levels of your company? Or were you going full guns trying to get the work done but left with fewer leaders by year-end and less capacity than you need for this coming year? Your commitment to training at all levels will allow

your company to scale and take advantage of this great economy.

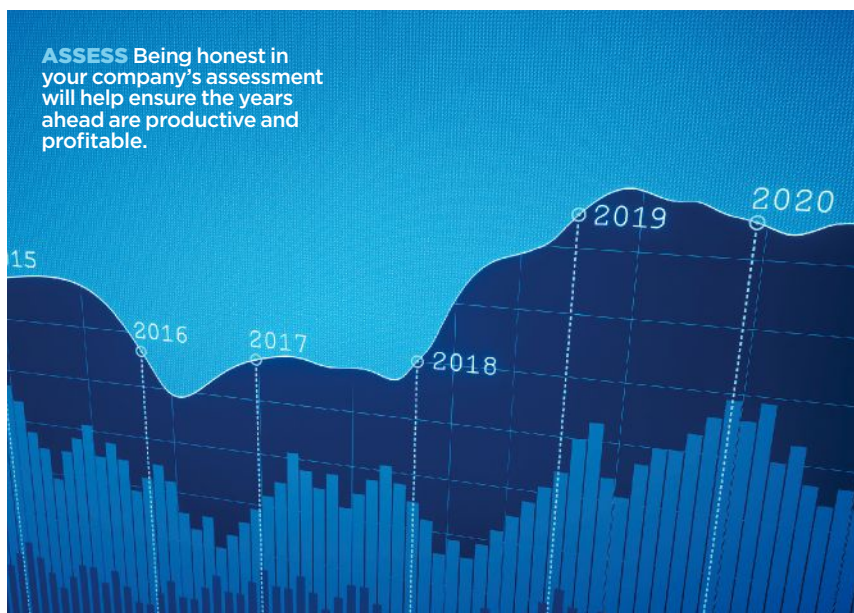
5 Scalability of your business. Besides people, how did you grow the operational capacity of your business? Were salespeople and managers optimized in their roles with the goals they were given? The quickest way to mediocre profit is giving your people average goals. Were your goals too low this past year?

6 Speed of information. Employees at all levels feel respected when you share information with them, such as how they are doing, how their division is performing and how the company is performing. The key is the speed with which you share this information. With my clients, we implement a scorecard with key cash, profit, client and employee metrics. How well do you keep your team in the know?

7 Aspirational vision. Great companies are driven by aspirational goals. The truly great ones have more than one aspiration. Apple wanted to beat Microsoft and make insanely great products that its clients never knew they needed. Nike wanted to beat Adidas and turn sneakers into everyday wear. How well do you communicate your vision to your team and how *uniquely aspirational* is your vision?

Rate yourself 0-10 on each of these drivers. Where you score eight or higher, write down what you should continue doing. Where you score seven or lower, note what you need to improve. Be honest and self-aware when undertaking this assessment. Do this with your team and prioritize your actions to make 2020 your best year ever! 

ASSESS Being honest in your company's assessment will help ensure the years ahead are productive and profitable.




ICE MELT SAFETY

When it comes to applying ice melt products, there are a few things snow contractors should keep in mind to ensure it's done properly and safely

- Consider using a product that has a pattern indicator, which is a colorant, so you can see where you're applying, especially during a snowstorm.
- Keep in mind that as much as 30 percent of granules can be lost due to bounce and scatter. Pay close attention if you're walking and using a spreader.
- If you're using a vehicle, make sure you have a reflector on the spreader.
- Apply to clean surfaces and pretreat when possible. Pretreating helps create a brine, which prevents the snow and ice from bonding to the pavement and other hardscapes. Avoid application when there's a half-inch of snow or more. If the brine is created too quickly, it becomes less effective.



- Be aware that overapplication can cause some ice melters to become slippery. More is not always better. Always follow the application rates recommended on product labels.
- Understand that some chlorides may harm the environment and greenery, and they also can ruin floors, deck fasteners and concrete.
- Consider using a sprayer for liquid ice melt products. 

SOURCES: MITCH VESTAL, PRESIDENT OF ADVANCE ORGANICS, AND VICTORIA MACK, CUSTOMER SERVICE SPECIALIST OF NATURAL ALTERNATIVE

PHOTO: NATURAL ALTERNATIVE

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GROW WITH GRUNDER

BY MARTY GRUNDER

The author is president and CEO of Grunder Landscaping Co. and The Grow Group, based in Dayton, Ohio. Reach him at marty@growgroupinc.com.



The Loving way

My team at The Grow Group, the green industry consultancy I run, is busy now putting the finishing touches on our annual conference. Scheduled for Feb. 24-26 in Charlotte, N.C., Grow! 2020 will bring together landscape pros from around the country for three days of interactive programming focused on real-world solutions to the challenges owners and their teams face. We'll also take an all-access tour of Loving, one of the fastest-growing landscaping companies in the country.

We've had the tremendous pleasure of getting to work closely with the Loving team in planning this event, and this month, I want to share with you what I've personally learned from this remarkable company. I am always on the lookout for what I can beg, borrow or steal (legally!) from successful businesses to implement at Grunder Landscaping, and with Loving, the lessons go on and on.

As goes the leader, so goes the company. This is a favorite saying of Jim Cali, a Grow Group executive

coach, and, at Loving, you can really see where it's true. Mike Haynes, Loving's founder and president, is 16 years younger than I am, but he is wise beyond his years. He's fiercely ambitious but has a heart of gold. He values — and expects — hard work, but he also knows how to throw a great party for his team. He's put love at the center of Loving, and you can see it threaded all the way through the organization.

I asked Mike how his approach to leadership has changed throughout his career. He said he's now able to read people better and to put them in roles that align with their strengths and aspirations. "No one shows up to work with a goal of screwing things up," he says. "Nearly everyone wants to be a contributor. It just comes down to discerning what that role looks like for each person."

They're obsessed with analytics.

Loving has really embraced technology to gain a competitive advantage, and it tracks its key performance indicators (KPIs) closely. If it's important to the business, it's measured

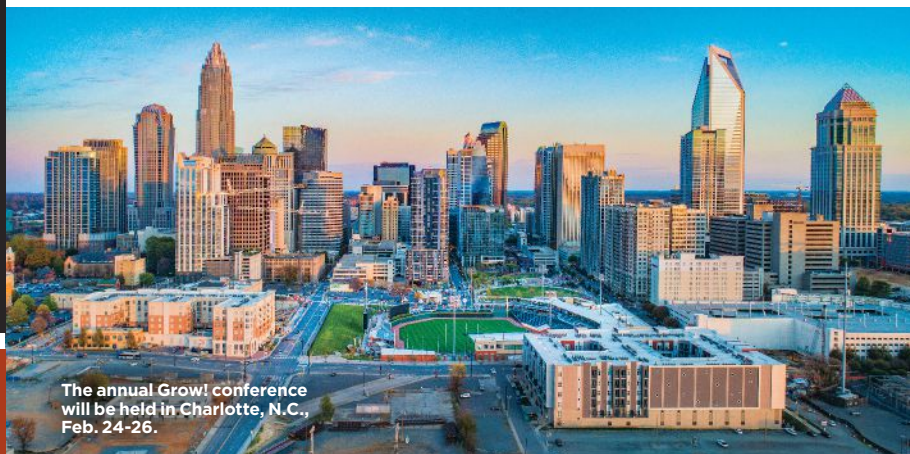
and managed. This is a key reason the company has been able to grow so quickly, but it's important to track your KPIs no matter your size. What's more, it doesn't have to be difficult to do. "I think we all get stuck making things too complicated," Mike says. "I have found that what we measure is typically what keeps me or my managers up at night. Don't overthink it."

They're smart marketers. Follow Loving on social media or watch one of the videos on its website, and you'll see what I mean. The company has succeeded in creating an authentic brand with a distinctive voice and an emotional appeal that goes way beyond landscaping. You can't help but want to be a part of the company, whether it's by working there, becoming a client or just following it.

They put people before profits.

I asked Mike how he gets the best out of his team. He rattled off all the usual suspects — above-market pay, profit sharing, abundant opportunities to advance — but then he said this: "I really believe the differentiating factor is that we uniquely care for and love each other. Whether it's coming together as a team to pay for the funeral expenses of a lost loved one or listening to someone going through a rough patch with a spouse, our folks' ability to create family is remarkable. It's my greatest joy at Loving."

As I said, this is a truly remarkable company in any industry. Join us in Charlotte and see — and learn — for yourself! 🍷



The annual Grow! conference will be held in Charlotte, N.C., Feb. 24-26.

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