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Irrigation companies reveal
how they've attained success
with education, smart
irrigation and more





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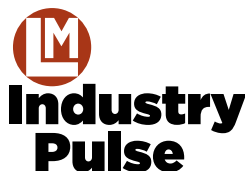
Nate Moses answers our questions on page 42.



[STATE OF THE INDUSTRY]

Industry Pulse

Since we're in the fourth quarter of what has been an unusual year — to say the least — we want input from you on how 2020 has been for your business. Please submit your answers for our annual Industry Pulse survey, which should be waiting in your inbox. And stay tuned, since the results will be published in the December issue of *LM*. If you are interested in being interviewed for the story, please contact *LM* Senior Editor Abby Hart at ahart@northcoastmedia.net.



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Are we having fun yet?

The answer is yes... your friends at *Landscape Management* magazine are having fun, and I hope it shows in the magazine we send you each month.

Last month, we produced that huge book-length magazine about a GIE+EXPO that didn't really happen, allowing us to talk to problem-solvers across all segments of the industry. It's not often we get to write imaginary tales in our jobs, so that was a fun one that tickled a different part of our brains than normal. When that magazine hit my desk, I let out a Kool-Aid man, "oh, yeah!" and then asked, "what's next?"

So, what did we come up with for this issue? Here are just a few highlights.

Our cover story was deftly handled by Associate Editor Sarah Webb, who continues to shine with her hard work for the publication. This month, she took a topic that might be (*ahem*) a little dry to the reader who doesn't live and die in the irrigation segment and made it an interesting read for everyone. It's written in the words of the sources, an "as told to" story, professional speaking to professional. Her story *Water Wisdom* begins on page 10 and includes intriguing insights from four irrigation professionals who took some unique approaches to the way they handle their businesses — for example, educating customers so much so that they decide to invest more with the company — a practice that could be borrowed by any company.

On page 26, Editor Christina Herrick enjoyed learning about the

“This month, Sarah took a topic that might be (*ahem*) a little dry to the reader who doesn't live and die in the irrigation segment, and made it an interesting read for everyone.”

picturesque Gaylord Texan Resort in Grapevine, Texas. LandCare is responsible for this beautiful property, one which we all look forward to seeing in person in 2023 when the venue hosts the National Association of Landscape Professionals' annual meeting. Paul Oylar is the account manager for the site and shared with us some fantastic photos of the resort, as well as some of his keys to success there.

On page 28, Senior Editor Abby Hart tells the charming story of how a mower manufacturer made such a deep impression on Aaron Godsey, owner/operator of Godsey Lawn in Pittsburg, Kan., that the company popped up in another momentous day in his life.

And, I had fun catching up with Nate Moses, president of Precision Landscape in Greenville, S.C., in this month's 5 Questions. We talked about how Nate got into the business, what his favorite books are and about a recent trip to New York City that resulted in an epic concert in Central Park. My interview with Nate appears on page 42.

Some more fun was had with the creation of the cover this month. The photo shoot was held at *Landscape Management* Publisher Bill Roddy's house, who recently had a new Rain Bird irrigation system installed. Chloe Scoular, our account manager on the magazine, is pretty handy with a camera. Our designer, Tracie Martinez, and Chloe pulled up at Bill's house and took a few hours shooting various images of his new irrigation system, installed by Thomas Irrigation, based in Olmsted Falls, Ohio. Thanks to Chloe, Tracie and Bill for their help in creating this month's cover (and if you consider yourself handy with a camera, we'd love to see what you've shot recently). And a tip of the cap to Tom Mickol of Thomas Irrigation for a job well done on the irrigation install.

Do we have room for any more fun in this issue? Oh, how about cameo appearances by Dallas Cowboys great Emmitt Smith and the World's Most Interesting Man from the Dos Equis commercials? No, they're not joining forces to create a new lawn care company, but they did lend their fame to celebrate a friend of the industry. I won't tell you where exactly they appear in the magazine, but you'll see them very soon.

Shoot me an email if you're having as much fun at your work as we are and let me know why. And, as the World's Most Interesting Man says, stay thirsty, my friends. 🍷



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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 companies lay the groundwork for a successful 2021?

“We are going over every molecule of 2020 to see where we can improve operations and profitability. For instance, can your credit card fees be lowered? Can you do better on your workman’s comp rate? By improving 500 things, you can save more money than by just one or two big things.”



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
New Orleans, La.

“Companies can lay the groundwork for a successful 2021 by identifying the largest problems their companies had in 2020. Once they have identified those problems, they need to have a plan in place to repair and improve the problems long before 2021 arrives.”



“Clearly identify strategic and operational goals for 2021.”

“Visualize where you want to be on 12/31/21 ... what do you need to do starting today to ensure you get there in 15 months? Think backward and focus on the most important items that will improve your business in the mid- to long term.”



“Develop a comprehensive marketing plan that speaks specifically to ‘beautifying your existing spaces.’”



“Someone once told me, ‘all planning is good.’ I love that statement. How would you know that 2021 was successful? Be as specific with your answers to that question as possible and then put an action plan in place to accomplish that and be realistic.”



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Reflecting on growth, leadership and sustainability at Virtual Landscapes 2020

BY SARAH WEBB, ABBY HART AND CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM STAFF

Landscape Management's editors attended the National Association of Landscape Professionals' (NALP) virtual event and grabbed a few nuggets of wisdom from the opening remarks and sessions on sustainability, leadership and more.

As the virtual event kicked off, outgoing President of NALP's board of directors Andrew Ziehler, president of Ziehler Lawn & Tree Care, said 2020 has been an experience of a lifetime.

"It was long at times; it was short at times," he said. "I think we were making decisions 30 minutes at a time for a while."

Ziehler tipped his hat to NALP for helping guide landscape and lawn care professionals through a challenging spring, with NALP's government affairs team advocating for the industry.

"That really gave us the strength to keep businesses open," he said.

Paul Fraynd, CEO and partner, Sun Valley Landscaping, and Seth Kehne, president of Lawn Butler, explained how they're each creating an employee-centric culture at their companies. They cited Gallup's State of the Global Workforce study that said engaged workforces are more productive, make 21 percent more profit and grow four times faster than nonengaged companies.

Fraynd and Kehne shared some of the tougher times in their businesses that led them to make changes and train and empower their employees.



"What's important is the people that you impact, and the easiest way to do that is to start with your team," Kehne said.

Shayne Newman (right) of YardApes hosts a virtual session at Landscapes 2020.

They laid out the elements of building a better employee culture, including purpose, values, fun, genuine care, communication and transparency, trust and accountability, growth and recognition, training, safety and maximizing employee value.

In a session on sustainable landscapes, Bob Grover of Pacific Landscape Management described how landscape companies can be more environmentally friendly.

Grover defined sustainable landscape management as low-impact, low-maintenance and low-resource practices that are adapted to a particular site and its climate. He said



that while no company can be 100 percent sustainable, companies can be more ecologically friendly by recycling, using low-emission equipment, incorporating bioswales, using solar panels, installing xeric landscapes and using goats as a weed control method.

"There's been a great focus the last couple of decades on saving the Earth. Some of the things we do put a bulls-eye on our chest," said Grover, naming wasting water, spraying chemicals and emitting air pollution. "Find a balance between (doing) the right thing for the environment and having it be affordable and acceptable." 🌱

Females forge ahead in green industry

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK AND ABBY HART | LM STAFF

Judith Guido, chairwoman and founder of Guido & Associates, asked attendees of the Illinois Landscape Contractors Association's (ILCA) Women's Networking Group, "How do you create your voice? How do you generate power?"

While there's no secret sauce to breaking through in the green industry, Guido said it's important to bring an aptitude for learning.

"If you want to flourish in a male industry, and if you want to make it in the green industry, skills matter," she said. "Don't wait to be asked. Just do it and prove it."

She also encouraged attendees to challenge assumptions and the status quo.

Guido offered several takeaways for women looking to enter or "break the glass ceiling" in the green industry: build a network; advocate for others; be resilient — break down stressful situations into manageable pieces and move on; take risks; get in front of more people; focus on facts in presentations and speak clearly; don't apologize so much; and never stop learning.

SiteOne Landscape Supply's Women in the Green Industry conference gave attendees strategies for advancing their careers and plenty to process. The virtual event drew attendees from all over the industry.

Michelle Rozen, Ph.D., a speaker specializing in change management and motivation, kicked off the event with a session titled, "How to Lead Forward through Change with Confidence."

She outlined a four-step process to welcome new opportunities in their lives. The steps included:

1. Empower.
2. Focus.
3. Overcome mind biases.
4. Implement the 20-minute rule. She recommends pausing for 20 minutes in a stressful situation to calm down and activate the brain's prefrontal cortex. 🧠



Judith Guido

NALP'S ANNUAL MEETING HEADS TO FLORIDA, TEXAS

The National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP) unveiled the dates and locations of its new annual meeting in 2022 and 2023, with help from NFL Hall of Famer Emmitt Smith (right) and



Sept. 18-21, 2022
Orlando Florida

Dos Equis' "Most Interesting Man in the World" (left).

After more than a decade of co-locating its annual meeting with GIE+ EXPO, the association will move its education and networking event to different cities around the country to allow new people the opportunity to participate in the event.

The new dates and locations are:
Sept. 18-21, 2022: Gaylord Palms Resort and Conference Center, Orlando, Fla.

Sept. 10-13, 2023:

Gaylord Texan Resort and Conference Center, Dallas, Texas.

(Editor's Note: To read about maintenance at the Gaylord Texan, turn to page 26.)



Sept. 10-13, 2023
Dallas, Texas

BRIGHTVIEW ACQUIRES COMMERCIAL TREE CARE

BrightView Holdings acquired Commercial Tree Care, a full-service tree care company based in San Jose, Calif. The purchase of Commercial Tree Care follows the sale of BrightView Tree Co. to Devil Mountain Nursery of San Ramon, Calif. Terms of the transactions were not disclosed.

"The acquisition of Commercial Tree strengthens BrightView's Maintenance operations in Northern California and positions us to be the foremost tree care service provider in the San Francisco Bay

Area," said Andrew Masterman, BrightView president and CEO.

Founded in 1992, Commercial Tree Care is a full-service tree care provider specializing in pruning, tree removal, stump grinding, cabling, bracing, fertility treatments, pest and disease control, install and transplant, forestry fire fighting and timber harvesting.

ICPI TO HOST HNA VIRTUAL EDUCATION EVENT

The Interlocking Concrete Pavement Institute (ICPI) will host its first virtual Hardscape North America (HNA) education event Jan. 26-27. The event consists of two days of education sessions for hardscape professionals.

The 42 sessions are broken down into three tracks: business, installation, and marketing and sales. The virtual event provides 30 continuing education hours, specifically for ICPI Certified Concrete Paver Installers.

Registration includes access to all sessions. Early-bird registration runs until Dec. 15.

WATER WISDOM

Irrigation companies reveal how they've attained success with education, smart irrigation and more

AS TOLD TO SARAH WEBB | *LM* ASSOCIATE EDITOR



GETTING SMART ABOUT WATER CONSERVATION

COMPANY: Weisburg Landscape Maintenance

FOUNDED: 2003

LOCATION: Colorado Springs, Colo.

SERVICE MIX: 58% maintenance, 22% construction, 20% snow services

CUSTOMER MIX: 100% commercial

ANNUAL REVENUE: \$5 million

Eric Moroski, vice president and co-owner of Weisburg Landscape Maintenance, reflects on how his company has become a strong ambassador of smart irrigation.

We always had a heavy interest in irrigation because where we live, Colorado Springs and the Front Range, are high, semiarid plains. Water is always an issue. We got to where we are now with efficient irrigation and conservation because we had a massive drought in 2002 that changed the landscape of Colorado.

It was bad. Drought restrictions came into play, and that hadn't really happened before. It really



USE IT WISELY
Equipment has evolved in the last 20 years to become more water efficient.

put the spotlight on plant selection and smart irrigation. I came into the company in 2003, but I was involved in 2002 with green industry advocacy, and we had a seat at the table to be able to say that we can both have nice landscapes and save water.

Colorado Springs takes about 70 percent of its water from the Western Slope in the Colorado River Basin. We don't have a major river running through our town. It's the reason why (the city is) so involved and also nationally known on our water conservation efforts and how we acquired and secured water all these years to make us a great city. There's a conservation department that doesn't care for having bluegrass on the Front Range, but if it's done smartly, we can all live in harmony, to be cheesy.

We (as an area) thought, we already squeezed our lawns, we can accept a few brown spots here and there in the summertime when it doesn't rain. It became more of, 'Let's have less lawn and more of a xeric model and understand irrigation better.'

In 2002, technology was limited, and in Colorado before that drought, if you had a brown spot in the middle of a big (turfgrass) area, you turned up all the zones. You just watered it. When we went to two-day-per-week restrictions in 2003 and 2004, people understood that we'd been wasting water. That was a critical point in water conservation.

The equipment has evolved from just throwing in sprinklers and setting it and forgetting it without any thought to what water efficiency is. That changed by way of education to get to the point where we know what new technology is, and we know how to use it and implement it.

From the very beginning, we have embraced the National Association of Landscape Professionals' Landscape Industry Certified program. We embraced that in the early

2000s. I got mine back in 2004. In 2017 and 2018, we made the top three companies in America for how many people on staff that

Continued on page 12

TOP OF MIND
A 2002 drought made smart irrigation a huge priority in Colorado Springs.





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Continued from page 11

were certified. It's a big deal, and we're not that big of a company, but it made me appreciate the emphasis we put on education early on. At this point, all of our irrigation staff are certified, which has put us in a position of being a leader in our region.

DOING RIGHT BY CLIENTS

COMPANY: Earthworks

FOUNDED: 1979

LOCATION: Alvarado, Texas

SERVICE MIX: 95% commercial, 5% municipal

CUSTOMER MIX: 60% maintenance, 23% design/build, 12% irrigation, 5% tree care

ANNUAL REVENUE: \$27 million projected in 2020

Chris Lee, president of Earthworks, lays out how the company builds trust with clients and, in turn, maximizes water savings.

The company was initially started in 1979 by my stepdad as a residential landscaping company called MC Lawn & Landscape. In 1987, we started to do more commercial work. The name was changed to Earthworks.

I came on in 1998. At that time, we hit \$1 million for the first time ever. We had about 30 employees and 30 trucks.

We have built an almost \$30 million landscape company without employing a single sales person. The only form

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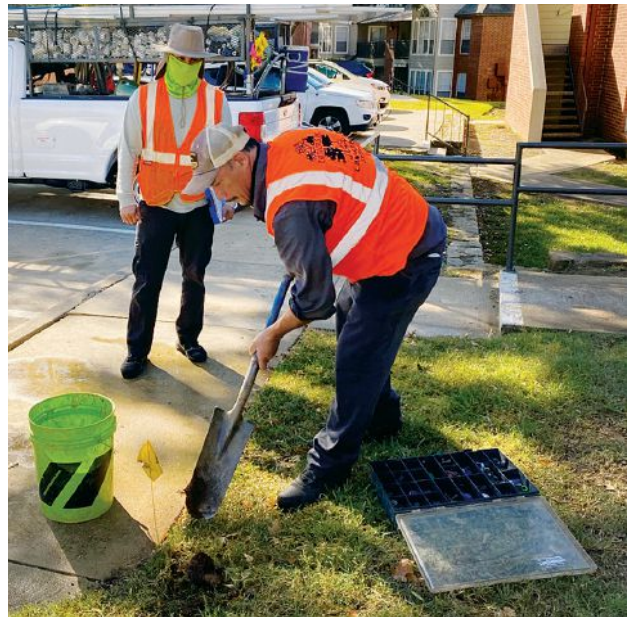


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PHOTO: EARTHWORKS

of advertising we do is educational marketing. None of our account managers or techs are on commission.

We don't want techs to be incentivized to give our clients bad ideas because there's money in it for them. If it's not good for the client, we don't want to do the work. It's great for the client to have that level of trust with us to know we have no incentive to do anything that's not right.

Over the years, we've discovered that 95 percent of the problems we have with clients stem from a lack of understanding. The education started as a result of the economy going down in 2007 and 2008 because of the housing crisis. A lot of our clients decided to start repairing irrigation themselves.

There's a potential for revenue loss, which is not good, but there's also potential for frustration because if an irrigation repair is not done correctly, it's easy for our guys to run over a head that's not installed properly or for the client to not use proper nozzles so that things don't get watered properly, and then we get blamed for why things are dying.

The initial idea was if we can't avoid (clients) doing this, we need to help them do it right. We started doing these classes, but we found that once people got a grasp

NOT SO EASY

By offering classes to clients, Earthworks showed them how much goes into irrigation.

Continued on page 14

Run out for irrigation parts, swing by for fertilizer and stop in for trimmer line— all without leaving your chair.

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Continued from page 13

of how complex irrigation is, it dawned on them that they didn't have any idea what they were doing.

We went in with the intention of helping them do it right but came out with a lot more business because they realized there was a lot to it. It's not just screwing the sprinkler head on where the old one was.

We'd always done the classes in person. Since COVID-19, we came up with a digital version. We tailor them to an individual client. We bring breakfast and have an hour and a half of stuff to go through to help the managers of the client understand irrigation.

Our other big initiative with irrigation is pushing all our clients onto an ET-based irrigation platform. We've been under restrictions for several years, and the more precise you can be about putting the right amount of water at each location, the more effective you are at managing the landscape and the less capital loss you have to deal with.

We're working it into our maintenance agreements as part of the deal. We've probably converted 60 percent of our clients to Weathermatic SmartLine, ET-based controllers, and it's great for the clients, it's great for the environment, but it also is great for our internal efficiency. Previously, where you had to have two guys in a truck to go change some settings, now an account manager from his phone can do the same thing.

We've incentivized clients by providing labor at no charge, which we make up through the contract. The manufacturer incentivizes with us with a lease program that allows us to get everything done with no money upfront with the client.

The reason it works is because we win, too. The client saves money and manages the property better, but we save money too. In this industry, it's really important that we're moving the ball forward on conservation.

EPIPHANIES AND EFFICIENCIES

COMPANY: Aqua Trac

FOUNDED: 2007

LOCATION: Litchfield Park, Ariz.

SERVICE MIX: 100% irrigation consulting

CUSTOMER MIX: Primarily commercial

Jim Kauth, president of Aqua Trac, shares the epiphany he had that led him to start an irrigation consulting company.

I was working on a property trying to lower the water usage, and it was 115 degrees out. We were trying to figure out a way to lower the water costs. That's when I had the epiphany that this is what I should be doing all the time. I was a landscape designer and contractor.

That property that I was working on was a large residential property. I own it now and actually live here.

I then learned everything I could learn about water conservation. I did all the classes, got all the certifications and all that stuff, but nobody wanted to hire me to save them water because water was cheap. The breakthrough in my business happened when the water rates in the Southwest went through the roof. Everybody came to see me because they needed to save money.

I came up with a way to raise the efficiency of an irrigation system and programming in a way where I could really lower the amount of water usage, but at the same time keep the plant life thriving. I started doing experiments on landscaping to see how much water I needed. Today, we are much more technical and use satellite data to help us determine if the landscape is receiving the correct amount of water.

For irrigation companies, I would say you should be inspecting every controller every month. If you can raise the efficiency of the irrigation system through inspections, you can lower the water costs by 25 percent.

My motto is, 'People don't do what you expect; they do what you inspect.' We train these irrigation techs

SYSTEM SMARTS
Manufacturers such as Rain Bird offer classes to help techs do the job right.



to inspect their own irrigation and how to make the repairs. We offer free training for any irrigation tech, and they can come to our training classes twice a year.

Overall, we're trying to help the little guy do the same thing we're doing on a big scale. I'll give them the information free. I would train anybody in a heartbeat. The thing that people don't realize is that in the irrigation and landscape industry, there needs to be more cooperation between all of us if we're really going to overcome the drought we're in.

Continued on page 16

PHOTO: LM STAFF



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Continued from page 15

LEARNING THE LANDSCAPE

COMPANY: Calafia Landscape
FOUNDED: 1998
LOCATION: San Jose, Calif.
SERVICE MIX: 80% construction, 20% maintenance
CUSTOMER MIX: 100% commercial
ANNUAL REVENUE: \$3.5 million projected in 2020

Rodger Preston, general manager of Calafia Landscape, explains why education is key to building rapport with employees and clients alike.

When we first started out, we were just doing residential homes. We slowly started getting into the commercial market, probably about

2001, 2002, and got away from residential homes altogether.

At a lot of the commercial properties in California, we're required to have smart, ET water systems, where it's solar- or satellite-based type of controllers. We would take the grass out, convert them over to drip lines and do plantings.

We always read our water meters every week to make sure our usage is staying in line with seasonal averages. If there's a spike, then we go and investigate to try to find out why there was a spike in case there's a main line break or the system is programmed too much for that time frame.

Early on, they didn't have a lot of the technology that we have now. Twenty years ago, you were trying to look at the systems and say, 'This area is too wet or too dry

based on moisture in the ground,' and then you'd program the clock accordingly. Now, we have moisture sensors that tell you're using too much water.


We also get recommendations from the architect when they design the systems, how much water usage we should be initially having based on their recommendations, and we use those as our starting point.

A lot of the manufacturers offer classes for the techs. Rain Bird is a good example. Then also, with the reclaimed water systems we have out here, especially in the Bay area, a lot of municipalities offer classes for us to go to as far as installing the reclaimed water systems properly and where the water comes from.

Reclaimed water is quite big out here, and it's a lot cheaper. We learn about how they want to manage some of those systems on their properties around these towns.

We send our crew members to these classes for education, rather than just hire somebody off the street and say, 'hey, go push the lawn or fix the sprinkler.' We don't want just anybody who doesn't really understand what their overall goal is out there trying to fix something. We want to try to conserve water and bring costs down for the customer.

The customers enjoy hearing that we're engaged in sending these people to learn about new controllers and learn about new policies from the municipalities. They see that we're really involved in their property and trying to save them money versus just trying to service them and move on.

Crew members love it, too. They want to move up the chain and get more experience. We try to treat them right and keep them around, and we do. The economy's good, they're working hard, and they're busy. 



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INNOVATIVE, EFFECTIVE AND SUPPORTED – SOLUTIONS FOR LCOs

CARE OF THE CUSTOMER

Quali-Pro meets the needs of distributors and LCOs with streamlined customer service and products designed with the user in mind

Customer service is a critical link between Quali-Pro, distributors and lawn care professionals. And for Quali-Pro it means keeping the end-user in mind at all times.

“Customer service really boils down to taking care of the customer,” Ian Rodriguez, Ph.D., technical service manager, Quali-Pro says.

Rodriguez says this means understanding what the customer needs in terms of both combination chemistries and pack sizes.

“When we launch products, we look at the bottle size that we’re providing to the LCOs specifically,” he says. “We’re focusing on the customer in the aspect of our combination chemistry and also our pack size. Like when we launched sulfentrazone (Expel), we put it in a bottle.”

Rodriguez says the quart size is more economical for the lawn care service providers to purchase



From left to right, Howard Stoddard, Mark Boyd, Curtis Clark and Ty Ferraro lead Quali-Pro with the customer in mind.

and easier to use since Expel is applied at a low rate. And, through conversations with the end-users, the team at Quali-Pro has focused on the best combination of active ingredients to save LCOs time.

Rodriguez says comments from LCOs such as “if I could have these two active ingredients in a jug it would be so much easier” have helped shape products such as the company’s 2DQ, which is a 2,4-D quinclorac combination.

And Rodriguez says conversations and feedback from lawn care professionals and distributors also helped shape the company’s Early Order Program (EOP), Simply Grow Together.

“We went back and we revamped it and made it more appealing to the LCO, paying on all products that are in our portfolio. As long as the rebate is more than \$100 the LCO qualifies for the rebate, which a majority of them do,” he says.

What service means to the distributor

For Jeff Jensen, turf and landscape sales rep for Tessman Seed Co. in St. Paul, Minn., customer service is something his company has come to depend on from Quali-Pro.

“We’re a smaller localized supplier so we thrive on saving our customers money,” he says. “That’s one of the things that Quali-Pro has been known to do, really give us great products at a great price. It really grew into a trust. We count on them to give us the best pricing and service and therefore we support their products.”

Jensen says Quali-Pro’s knowledge base with both sales representatives and Rodriguez as a technical service manager is comforting.

“Whenever we have a question, they’re back to us within a day or a couple of hours,” he says. “They care about our business. There’s always someone there to help.”

Even though Tessman Seed



Ian Rodriguez

SPONSORED CONTENT

Co. is in Minnesota and Quali-Pro products ship from Texas, according to Jensen, the shipments arrive quickly and accurately.

“We get our products in such a timely fashion,” he says. “The tracking methods are wonderful. If we need something, we need to know when it’s coming in and we need to tell the customer when it’s going to happen.”

Jensen says the connection to the Quali-Pro team is a bonus, as “it’s fun to work with a great group.”

What service means to the lawn care professional

Chris Stuhr, owner of A Greener Image Lawncare in Mound, Minn., says he started using Quali-Pro products after a conversation with



Jeff Jensen

his sales rep, Jensen, at Tessman Seed.

“I had a customer request a low odor product and my supplier mentioned Quali-Pro,” Stuhr says, noting Jensen told him, “we’ve had good luck with it, they’ve got a good sales program.”

Stuhr says he switched to Quali-Pro’s 2DQ and 3-D herbicides and his customers no longer complain about the scent of the products he uses.

“The Quali-Pro (herbicide) has been pretty consistent from spring through the heat of the summer to the fall, I don’t have any major worry or concerns,” he says. “It’s been wonderful, and that takes the debate and question out of it.”

Stuhr says that Jensen is there to field any questions he might have, and he knows Jensen will get back to him quickly. And Jensen helped

steer him toward Quali-Pro’s Simply Grow Together EOP. He says the program helps save him money, which allows him to invest back into his company through the purchase of other items his business needs.

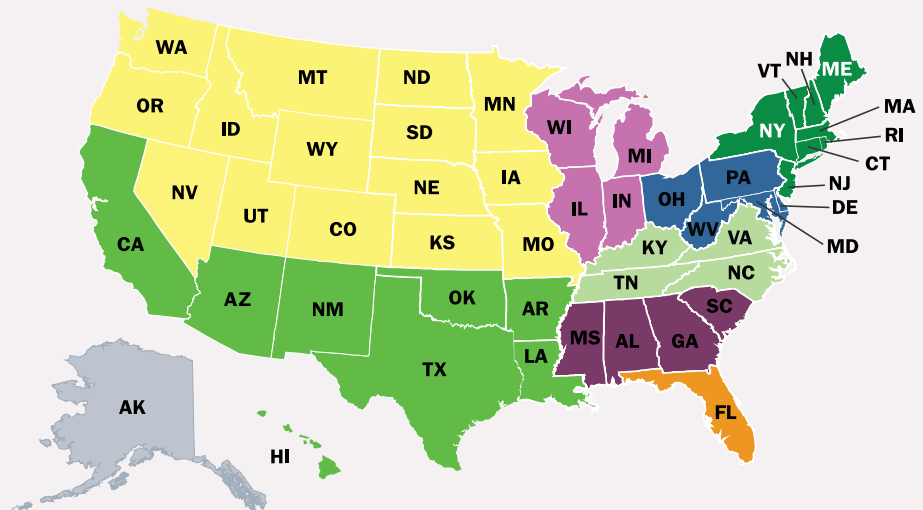
“If I book my product in the fall, I get a nice discount buying it by the pallet and it’s well worth it,” he says. “It saved me 10 percent this year. It helps pay for something else. That’s a pallet of fertilizer.”

Stuhr says he’s been very pleased with the results he’s seen using Quali-Pro products on his customers’ lawns.

“I’ve turned other guys on to it, competitors that I’m friends with,” he says. “We all talk about what we’re running. Quali-Pro seems to stand up against the best of them and it really seems to shine when you compare price.”

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FERTILE GROUND

Slow and steady

Experts offer advice on how enhanced-efficiency fertilizers can help lawn care operators stay efficient in 2021

BY ABBY HART | LM SENIOR EDITOR

As lawn care operators (LCOs) finish out the unusual year that was 2020 and prepare for 2021, some are looking to examine how fertilizers can help them operate more efficiently and cost-effectively.

“The lawn care industry in general is continuing to still see growth,” says Tony Goldsby, director, professional turf products at The Andersons Plant Nutrient Group. “As far as fertilizers go, I think a lot of (lawn care operators) are looking for opportunities to continue to try and save money and also provide their clients with really high-quality turfgrasses.”

We spoke with Goldsby and Jeremy Bigler, channel manager at Lebanon Turf, about how enhanced-efficiency fertilizers could be the answer to helping LCOs achieve healthy turf while also helping them handle costs and labor shortages.

IMPROVE FERTILIZER EFFICACY

Goldsby explains that “enhanced efficiency” is a broad definition that covers any fertilizer with a slow-release profile. The slow release can come from either putting a physical coating on the prill, like in polycoated urea, which has



Anthony Goldsby



EFFICIENT AND EFFECTIVE
Enhanced-efficiency fertilizers can slow down plant growth, cutting down on needed maintenance.

a plastic coating that slows down the release of that material, or stabilized nitrogen products. Stabilized nitrogen products are those where the fertilizer prill is combined with several inhibitor chemicals that prevent the loss of fertilizer material, both to the environment (a process known as volatilization) and into the soil profile.

“First and foremost, (enhanced-efficiency fertilizers) help a lot with just protecting that fertilizer investment from being lost to the environment,” Goldsby says. When it’s lost to the environment, it cannot be used by the turf. He then notes that when you add a urea product to turf without any inhibitors and the conditions are right, you can lose up to 40 percent of the nitrogen within a few days to the atmosphere through volatilization.

LESS LABOR

Goldsby points out that the longevity of the enhanced-efficiency products slows down plant growth, which cuts down on the maintenance needed on a lawn.

“If the company is doing mowing and fertilizing, then they don’t have to mow as often,” he says. “Then, the other part to it is you can potentially get away with a lower (application) rate just because it’s spreading that feeding out over a longer period of time.”

These types of fertilizers, depending on the polymer coating, can feed the turf for six to eight weeks or longer in some cases, as opposed to seven to 14 days with a typical urea fertilizer. Goldsby estimates that LCOs are doing half to two-thirds of the amount of applications they typically would.

Though the enhanced-efficiency products often have a higher upfront cost, Goldsby says that you’re offsetting the cost increase by making sure that you’re keeping those nutrients in the soil, in a place where the turfgrass can actually use them.

CONTROL GROWTH

In addition to preventing nitrogen loss, which improves the fertilizer’s efficacy, the difference between enhanced-efficiency fertilizers and quickly available

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FERTILE GROUND

Continued from page 19
urea fertilizers is that the plant takes up the readily available urea immediately, which results in rapid growth, Goldsby says.

“The process is somewhat slowed down, or it’s a little bit smoother, when you’re putting down an enhanced-efficiency product, whether it’s a coated product or a stabilized product,” he explains. “That’s going to result in a longer feeding profile, and therefore, you’re not going to have to come back and do as many applications as you would with a quickly available course of nitrogen, like urea.”

Jeremy Bigler, channel manager at Lebanon Turf, adds that there could be an additional downside to traditional fertilizer applications: plant



Jeremy Bigler

stress. He says that with controlled-release fertilizers, there’s less chance of stressing out the plant or burning the turf if you have a product with a high volume of controlled-release content.

COMBINATION PRODUCTS

Bigler also recommends considering a formula that includes not only a controlled-release fertilizer, but also active ingredients, such as controlled-release fertilizer with herbicides, insecticides or both.

He explains there are additional products with multiple active ingredients, “For example, (use) preemergent

and postemergent for that late spring application so that you’re preventing the crabgrass and taking care of those broadleaf weeds like dandelions at the same time.”

COMPLIANCE WITH STATE REGULATIONS

Both Bigler and Goldsby advise LCOs to keep an eye on application regulations that surround the turf and ornamental market.

“There are states like Maryland where they’ve mandated that you can’t use more than 1 pound of nitrogen application in a year, unless it comes from an enhanced-efficiency fertilizer source,” Goldsby says. “If you’re going to put out more than that, then it’s going to have to come from an enhanced-efficiency source.”



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SOFTWARE UPDATE

Speed up operations with software

When time is money, LCOs say software's capabilities can help users spend less time on paperwork and more time on service calls

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

This has been a good year for Jeremy Nestor's business, Quality Yard & Home Maintenance in Pataskala, Ohio. The company provides lawn care, maintenance and landscaping, snow and ice removal, home maintenance and pest control for primarily residential clients.

The company switched to ArborGold software about a year ago, and Nestor says his company is already seeing the benefits. "Our net profit percentage has increased by 50 percent from last year," he says. "Some of that comes from switching over to this new software." Nestor; Nick Froio, owner of Froio's Lawn & Landscape in West Chester, Pa.; and Aaron Darr, business developer and managing partner of A+ Lawn & Landscape in Des Moines, Iowa, share how finding the right software helped boost their companies' bottom lines.

Nestor says ArborGold's paperless offerings helped his company reach clients in different ways during the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, using ArborGold's mobile estimator app, a technician measures the lawn from a tablet using the software's Google Maps integration. Based on the square footage, the software adds the lawn care program,



Nick Froio

and pricing populates in the quote.

Froio says a short turnaround between getting a call from a client and giving an estimate means more business. "Our business is able to grow because we are able to give estimates very quickly from either the office or often, while sitting in the customer's driveway," he says.

Froio's Lawn & Landscape provides lawn maintenance and lawn care, hard-scape, tree care, irrigation and masonry services for a primarily residential clientele and snow and ice removal for a commercial clientele. It transitioned to ArborGold in February.

MORE EFFICIENT

Darr, whose company uses ServSuite Lawn Care Software by ServicePro, says the intelligent routing made a big impact on his company's profits.

A+ Lawn & Landscape has been using ServicePro for almost two years. The company serves both residential and commercial clients in maintenance, lawn care, tree care, pest control, irrigation, landscape design and build, snow removal, holiday lights and landscape lighting.



Jeremy Nestor

It also has a water division.

Instead of relying on customers to schedule irrigation shut-offs and potentially revisiting the same street several times in



Aaron Darr

the fall, A+ uses software to build the schedule.

"We used to have the entire irrigation staff make these calls and get these slots filled up. Now, these customers simply respond (to a text message) with a 'C' with their cellphone, and it confirms that appointment," Darr says. "It's increased our profits in that division by more than five points."

Like Darr, Froio uses software for scheduling.

"ArbOrgold lets me schedule all of these services out by selecting the frequency and duration," he says. "This alone saves so much time with scheduling routes."

Darr says ServicePro's cloud-based paperless entry system allows a technician to order repairs while on a service call, perform them and bill the customer all in one stop.

MARKETING MAGIC

ServicePro's cancellation marketing modules offer customers a second chance with an offer for a discounted first service. That option has been popular with A+'s clients, Darr says.

"If that person doesn't reply to a quote, we have it set up to send an email a week later and then another one that says something different two weeks later and one a month later," he says. "A lot of people respond to it that way."

Similarly, Nestor says ArborGold's integrated marketing automatically follows up on quotes.

Whether it's following up on quotes or cancellations, going the extra step to communicate with clients can make the biggest impact, Darr says.

"When I think about profits, it all rolls into less customer friction, which means happier customers, which means generally, they're going to say yes to more of your services, which means more money," he says. 📞

WEED AVENGERS

Pesky no more

Experts give the lowdown on how to combat three tough weeds

BY SARAH WEBB | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR



COMMON PURSLANE

A summer annual, common purslane can be found in areas where the turf or soil has been disturbed. It grows low to the ground, laterally and can form in mats. The leaves and stems of purslane are thick and fleshy like a jade plant. Stems and leaves grow from a central point and stay prostrate along the ground. Stems are purple, while the leaves are green. It produces yellow flowers in the summer.

Because it's found in weakened turf areas, fertilizing will help reduce competition and thicken the canopy. It also can be managed with summer weed control programs, through postemergent herbicides that include 2,4-D, carfentrazone and dicamba. An organosilicone surfactant on its own can cause common purslane plants to lose water from leaf tissue and desiccate.



YELLOW FOXTAIL

Yellow foxtail is a summer annual grass with flat blades that can't be rolled between the fingers. It has a hairy ligule at the base of the leaf, and scraggly hairs often come up about a third of the leaf blade. It may have a maroon or reddish color at the base of the plant. If seedheads are present, foxtails are easy to identify since their spikelike seedheads or inflorescences resemble foxtails. It germinates along with crabgrass and goosegrass in midspring and dies with the first frost in temperate regions. Foxtails often have red to purple stems near the crown of the plant and are less prostrate than crabgrass.

They're usually found in compacted areas, so maintaining a thick, healthy lawn is the easiest way to prevent foxtail infiltration. All preemergent herbicides and postemergent herbicides that are effective for crabgrass control, like quinclorac, fenoxaprop, mesotrione and topramezone, are also effective for foxtail control.



KNOTWEED

Often found in very compacted soils where other plants cannot survive, prostrate knotweed is a mat-forming broadleaf annual. Stems of mature plants are very wiry, and leaves are arranged alternately (not opposite) on the stems. This weed is one of the first annuals to emerge in the spring. It will germinate before soil temperatures get to 57 or 58 degrees F, before crabgrass. Featuring narrow leaves and a rounded stem, knotweed can produce ocreae that look like a membrane at the base of the leaf where the leaves join to the stem.

Culturally, lawn care operators can aerate in the fall or spring. In the fall, it's beneficial to seed affected areas to establish turf in the competitive environment. Postemergent herbicides with pyridine or that contain a protoporphyrinogen oxidase inhibitor active ingredient, like carfentrazone or flumioxazin, can be effective. 📌

SOURCES: Ken Hutto, Ph.D., product development manager for herbicides and fungicides for FMC; Bret Corbett, director of technical services for Prime Source; Aaron Hathaway, technical services manager for Nufarm.

PHOTOS: NUFARM (PURSLANE); NUFARM (FOXTAIL); ROBERT VIDEKI, DORONICUM (KFT); BUGWOOD.ORG (KNOTWEED)

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PROTECT YOUR TURF

Dedicated to dirt

Lawn care experts explain why it pays off to focus on not just the grass, but the dirt, too

BY ABBY HART | LM SENIOR EDITOR

When it comes to lawn care, lawn care operator (LCO) Andrew Kenley likes to think of soil in terms of dollars and cents.

“When you invest in the soil, you can think about it like a bank account,” he says. “Our premise has been let’s put back into the soil what we take out and then some.”

He uses carbon-based liquid and granular fertilizers from Earthworks to add carbon, provide organically derived nutrients and minerals, and promote the proliferation of microbial life in the soil.

Kenley says that creating this microbial environment enriches the soil and creates naturally beneficial topsoil.

“It holds water and nutrients better. It mineralizes nitrogen faster,” he says. He reports that because the organic products promote a more diverse ecosystem in the soil, his herbicides work better, and he sees lower instances of fungus and pests.

Kenley’s company, Natural State Horticulture, is based in Little Rock, Ark. The company has a revenue of \$600,000 and provides lawn care services to a mostly residential clientele.

Since starting the company in 2012, he’s focused on organic products. “We saw a hole in the market. Not to demonize chemicals, but we want to choose the best and the safest options and also focus on the soil.”



John Fowler

TESTING, TESTING

Joel Simmons, president at Earthworks, recommends lawn care operators looking to manage their soils should kick off the process with a soil test.

“The soil test will tell you what your calcium and magnesium ratios are,” he says. “If calcium is out of balance, the soil becomes very tight and compacted.”

By balancing those ratios, the soil begins to open up for more air and water, and LCOs will find significantly better recovery and survivability of planting material, deeper and stronger rooting, and the turf will require fewer inputs, because the soil is going to do the work of feeding the plant, Simmons says.

TIME IS MONEY

Feeding the turf with bio-based fertilizers is also a main goal of John Fowler, vice president of sales for the turf division, Anuvia Plant Nutrients. He happens to look at lawn care from two different perspectives, since he’s also the owner of Amazing Grass, which provides lawn care to 85 percent residential clients in the Baltimore area.

Fowler says that bio-based fertilizers add nitrogen and are a good source of iron. They also add sulfur, a key component to good soil. He says he’s often asked what the upsides are of bio-based fertilizers.

“The nutrients are immediately available,” he explains. “What would take years to get to the nutrients and amino acids of a manure application,

we’re getting to in 12 minutes through our reaction process and turning them into something that is useful for the soil.”

FIX THE SOIL

“I don’t want to own a company that just makes money,” says Justin Berg, president, Purple Care. “Bio-based products are better for the earth, better for our soil and the plants that grow in them.”

Purple Care is based in Fort Worth, Texas. The company has \$6 million in revenue and offers lawn care, maintenance and pest control services to primarily residential clients.

Berg uses bio-based fertilizers because they won’t burn turf in Texas’ high temperatures, and the results are longer lasting.

“When you use synthetic NPK fertilizers, it’s pretty much gone within 60 days,” he says. “With these, the product stays behind, the green stays longer and we can trust the overall health of our grass.”

Berg concedes that going the organic, bio-based route costs more — about double the price, but it’s also allowed him to save on nitrogen, where he’s reduced his costs by 25 percent.

“When you go with a bio product, you’re able to balance the soil without having to use a ton of nitrogen,” he says. “Fix the soil, and you’ll fix a lot of things.”



Natural State Horticulture uses Earthworks carbon-based liquid fertilizers to enrich soils and improve turf health.



Justin Berg

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THE BIG ONE

Everything's bigger in Texas

LOCATION Grapevine, Texas

COMPANY LandCare

DETAILS The Gaylord Texan is an 1,814-room resort and convention center near Dallas. The facility has a 10-acre water park and a replica of San Antonio's River Walk. LandCare, which has crews on-site seven days a week watering plants, picking up trash and more, also maintains the Gaylord Palms in Florida. It started working on the Texan because of the good relationship the company built.

Three years ago, LandCare switched to Echo, Stihl and Greenworks battery-powered equipment to maintain the property around the building, especially before 9:30 a.m. Paul Oyler, account manager with LandCare, says crews were always working under a time constraint, and these machines are quieter.

"Being a high-profile resort, you're always on stage," he says. "Excessive noise can ruin the guest experience."

LandCare uses plant growth regulators such as Trimect from Rainbow Treecare Scientific Advancements to reduce maintenance. "We want to stay in the background," Oyler says. "PGRs allow us to keep the shrubs clean and neat for a longer period without spending all of our time pruning."

The Gaylord Texan Resort & Convention Center is the 2023 location for the National Association of Landscape Professionals' (NALP) annual meeting. This project earned LandCare a 2019 Gold Award from NALP's Awards of Excellence program.

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



PHOTOS: LANDCARE



Captions | **1.** The Gaylord Texan is a sprawling resort set on Grapevine Lake near Dallas. It features an atrium with 5 acres of gardens, a resort and a convention center. **2.** LandCare replaced arbor mulch with creek stone and installed low-maintenance plant material to reduce water waste around the property. **3.** When LandCare started maintaining the property, crews noticed a main-line break in the resort's irrigation system. The company also addressed water pressure issues by relocating the line and moving it to an area with less foot traffic. **4.** The resort's four restaurants offer naturally shaded seating for guests. **5.** Flowering shrubs and trees line the lazy river. LandCare uses plant growth regulators to help slow growth and reduce pruning. **6.** Feather grass spills over the rustic planters.

BRAND U

A piece of cake

A landscaper shares why Grasshopper mowers have played a role in the biggest moments of his life

BY ABBY HART | LM SENIOR EDITOR

Mowing contractors are often loyal to equipment brands, but no matter how much they love their equipment, it's rare to see a mower make an appearance at a landscaper's wedding reception.

"My groomsman cake at my wedding 10 years ago was a Grasshopper mower," says Aaron Godsey, owner/operator of Godsey Lawn in Pittsburg, Kan.

He and Grasshopper mowers go all the way back to his childhood, when he would attend a big farm show in his hometown with his dad and watch Grasshopper mower demonstrations.

Godsey Lawn brings in about \$400,000 per year and provides 50 percent mowing, 25 percent leaf removal, 25 percent snow removal and occasional tree work to a completely residential clientele.

"We run Kubota three-cylinder diesel engines," Godsey says. Though it costs more upfront, he says these are simple diesel engines, and he's had very few problems. "A gas mower, you usually run around a gallon an hour. With our diesels, we can run 1.5 hours per gallon."

Godsey Lawn bags and removes leaves instead of mulching them. The

Grasshopper has an impeller that goes on the side of the deck and a vacuum that can pick up pine needles and leaves.

Godsey started mowing lawns at 16, and shortly after, he purchased a Grasshopper for his business.

"I started off with a junky old riding lawn mower," he recalls. "It broke down, and I had a big client that wanted the yard mowed. After seeing Grasshoppers at the show with my dad and seeing a friend's dad mow their big lawn with it, I decided it was time to get one of my own."

Godsey has had 15 Grasshopper mowers over the last 23 years, including the 900D and two 930Ds he currently runs. "I'm not going to lie and say I've never tried any other mowers," he says. "But, I've only owned Grasshoppers."

He still has a mower from 2010 with 4,600 miles on it.

One of his favorite features about Grasshoppers? That the decks on some models are front mounted, allowing

the operator to get very close to a tree or a fence, allowing for better maneuverability and cut. He prefers a front-mount deck to a midmount deck, where the deck sits underneath the operator.

"To me, I don't see a big advantage to having the deck underneath you," he says. "Having it in front of you, you can go right up to a corner of a fence and mow the whole way. You could run into a fence with the midmount."

If only someone had told the baker of his wedding cake.

"The mower was beautiful, and the cake was so cool," he says. "But, it was a midmount." 🍰

In the last 10 years, Grasshopper has come out with a power-fold deck, which Godsey finds useful for servicing the blades. "You just hit a switch, and the deck stands right up," he explains. "The blades are right there in your face. You can sharpen the blades, access the deck and scrape out the deck."

Godsey Lawn owns several snow plow attachments for when the snow takes over in Kansas. "We buy one machine, and we're able to use that machine all year around," he says. The company has a Grasshopper V-plow, a 48-inch plow and a 60-inch plow.



Aaron Godsey



PHOTO: GRASSHOPPER



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MAINTENANCE SHOP

End of season mower maintenance

Experts from Echo and Briggs & Stratton provide insight into what maintenance needs to be performed on mower components

BY SARAH WEBB | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR



Whether landscape professionals use battery- or gas-powered mowers, maintenance is a must to keep the machines in good working conditions and increase crews' uptime.

"If you get (maintenance) done, when that unit comes out in spring, it's ready to go 100 percent," says Tom Billigen, training and development manager for Briggs & Stratton. "You're making sure that machine is operating at peak performance."

Landscape Management got the run-down from Billigen and Jason Wilk, product manager for Echo, on what landscapers should do at the end of the season so the machines are ready to roll out come spring.

ENGINE

The gas-powered engine checklist includes several items, especially when it comes to the end of the year.

Before storing the unit at the end of the season, change the engine oil, oil filter and fuel filter; treat the fuel system with a stabilizer; clean or replace the air filter; and replace the spark plugs. Billigen recommends consulting the operator's manual for the best practices on each machine.

He notes, "Never treat the fuel in the machine itself because your likelihood of getting the mix ratio correct is slim, and you'll ruin the chances of it doing its job correctly. Once you put your fuel stabilizer in a gas can, you fill that

gas can, put some in the machine and run it for 10 or 15 minutes to ensure that treated fuel has made it through to the engine."

OIL

Billigen suggests landscapers drain the hydraulic oil, change the filter and refill it at around 250 or 500 hours on most units.

BATTERY

While battery-powered units don't require the same maintenance as gas-powered units, operators still need to perform some upkeep, Wilk notes.

Billigen suggests landscapers check for corrosion at the battery terminals, make sure the terminals are tight and, if it's a serviceable-type battery, ensure it has the proper amount of distilled water in it.

Especially in colder regions, Wilk recommends taking the battery out of the mower and ensuring it's charged to about 40 or 50 percent capacity.

"You wouldn't want it next to anything corrosive, like a bag of fertilizer," Wilk says. "There are a lot of really small wires, computer chips and electrical contact points, so you want it in a dry location away from any huge temperature swings."

DECK, BLADES

To ensure mowers are running at peak efficiency, landscape pros should scrape out grass that builds up in the deck and blades.

Buildup inhibits air flow under the mower deck and its ability to pull grass up into the blades.

↑ CLEAR CUT
Scraping clippings and debris from the mower deck after each use helps ensure a cleaner cut.

"The wind drag of the blade rotating under the deck can consume battery life, so we try to make that as aerodynamic as possible," Wilk says.

Additionally, landscapers should sharpen blades around every 20 to 25 hours of use, Billigen says.


"This makes the machines process the grass quickly. It's also healthier for the grass if you're cutting it clean instead of ripping at it with a dull blade," Billigen says. "There are no rules of thumb on when to replace them, but if they're heavily worn back from so many sharpenings, you should (get new ones)."

Finally, inspect the mower deck drive belt for cracks or damage and grease the spindles if applicable.

TIRES

When it comes to tires, a visual inspection works well. Landscapers should look for damage or punctures and excessive tread wear. The end of the season is a good time to change tires, if needed.

Billigen suggests making sure tire pressures are set to specification based on the operator's manual.

"The tire pressure will help with traction and help with cutting performance because if one tire is less inflated than the other, the unit doesn't sit level, and the cutting deck doesn't cut level," he says. 

SNOW STRATEGY

Winning pricing strategies for snow contracts

BY PHIL HARWOOD | LM CONTRIBUTOR

If you're a snow contractor, snow and ice management services should be your most profitable service line because they're emergency services performed in extreme weather conditions and produce an increased exposure to claims.

It's essential to have a winning pricing strategy for snow. There are two common pricing strategies employed by snow contractors. The first is based on what the contractor needs to charge to be profitable, regardless of what the competition is charging. The second is based on what the competition is charging, regardless of what the contractor needs to charge to be profitable. Let's look at each approach more closely and discuss ways to make each one a winning strategy.

PROFIT-FOCUSED APPROACH

The profit-focused approach makes sense from a purely financial perspective. With this approach, prices are established through a systematic budgeting process that ensures all expenses are covered and profit targets are met. Setting prices is essentially a math problem. When prices are set, they are what they are.

The two extremes of this profit-focused approach are the premium providers and the cost leaders. Snow contractors providing exceptional or unique services are able to command premium prices. This model is a high-cost, high-profit approach that works in certain niche markets. These snow contractors are good, and they know it. Their customers know it, too, and are willing to pay for it.

At the other end of the pricing spectrum are the snow contractors who are charging low prices that are sufficient

to meet their financial goals. These contractors know their numbers and are only charging what they need to charge. While their competitors disparagingly call them low-ballers, they are laughing all the way to the bank. This model is a low-cost, sufficient-profit approach that works well in certain customer segments.

My advice to the profit-focused snow contractors is to remain aware of what your competitors are doing, including their pricing strategies. There is a tendency for profit-focused contractors to become too inwardly focused and adopt a "take-it-or-leave it" mindset. While it's good to be confident in your numbers, it's also good to be mindful of your competitors and how this relates to the uniqueness of your value proposition.

MARKET-FOCUSED APPROACH

The second common pricing strategy for snow contractors is to find out what the competition is charging and either match these prices or undercut them. The obvious flaw in this approach is that it fails to take into account the contractor's cost structure and profit objectives. Market prices may be sufficient, but they may not be.

I'm part of several snow industry social media groups. Almost every day, a group member asks the group what he or she should charge. The post is followed by lots of responses. However, I don't know if I've ever read a response that mentioned the cost side of this question, as if it's irrelevant. Pro tip: profit is not irrelevant.

My advice to the market-focused snow contractors is to know your own numbers. Roll up your sleeves and work through the financials to understand


your cost structure and determine the prices you want to sell at. Then, you'll be much more equipped to evaluate market prices and whether or not you can match or beat them.

THE WINNING STRATEGY

The winning pricing strategy is to incorporate both approaches into your pricing strategy. Know your numbers and know your competition. By doing so, you may discover that your prices are too low, your prices are insufficient to deliver the profit you desire or you're simply leaving money on the table.

Recently, I met with a snow contractor. We discussed the selling price for treated salt applied to parking lots, and I encouraged him to find out what some of his friendly competitors were charging. After making a few phone calls, he realized that his price was half of what the rest of the market was charging. He had been leaving big money on the table for years and didn't even know it. We discovered the oversight and fixed it in a matter of minutes.

Alternatively, you may discover that your prices are too high because your cost structure is out of line, or you're just being overly aggressive in your pricing. My advice is to develop a better understanding of financial matters. Become an expert at budgeting and pricing. Benchmark both costs and prices against your peers and competitors.

My last word of advice is to join a snow industry peer group. If you're serious about snow, the knowledge you'll gain will be invaluable. The Snow & Ice Management Association (SIMA) offers peer groups for its members. Visit Sima.org to learn more. Now go forth. 

The author is managing director of Grow The Bench. Reach him at Phil@GrowTheBench.com.

HARDSCAPE SOLUTIONS

Site for a stroll

LOCATION West Islip, N.Y.

COMPANY Goldberg & Rodler

DETAILS Catholic Health Services of Long Island selected Goldberg & Rodler for this project, located near a nursing home and rehabilitation care facility. The design elements highlight the beach environment of Fire Island.

The project includes walkways with subtle slopes, a water feature with a shallow pond, a stream with fish and a three-tiered waterfall.

“We wanted them to be able to utilize the space for passive and active recreation,” says Nick Onesto, landscape designer, Goldberg & Rodler.

Long Island boulders provided sculptural elements for the project. Goldberg & Rodler also used Kichler Lighting and Unilock Brussels Block pavers and incorporated religious sculptures throughout the landscaping, which the client requested.

Challenges to the project included making the walking path accessible for those with disabilities with as many exits and entry locations as possible.

“It was essential that a user would not be able to be lost within the design,” Onesto says. “If you design for people with dementia, you really want things to be cyclical and be able to go around and not have any dead ends, pinch points or trap points for the users.”

This project earned Goldberg & Rodler a 2019 Silver Award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals’ Awards of Excellence program.

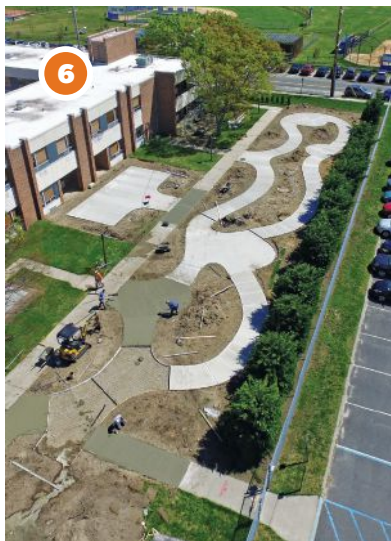
See more photos from this project at LandscapeManagement.net/hardscapesolutions.



1



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PHOTOS: SUE SOTERA (1-5, 8); LUIGI IANNUCCI (6-7, 9)



Captions | **1.** The project's native stone and boulders helped celebrate the marine ecosystem of Fire Island. **2.** A slight incline gives visitors, which include nursing home rehabilitation patients, a bit of resistance while walking through the garden. **3.** Boulders and stone surround the three-tiered waterfall and pond to give them a natural feel. Goldberg & Rodler developed custom-blend gravel of crushed Long Island pebbles, salt and pepper gravel and light and dark quartz. **4.** Long Island boulders and stones shape the pond and reflect the beachlike, marine environment of Fire Island. **5.** The site is near the ocean and is susceptible to storm tidal surges. Since the garden is susceptible to flooding, all plantings needed to be saltwater tolerant and resistant. **6.** The stroll garden took shape after crews buried an overhead electric line during the project. **7.** The stroll garden features many entrances and exits as a safety protocol because some patients from the nearby nursing home suffer from dementia. **8.** This before photo shows the underused lawn area. **9.** An overhead look at the location of the project before construction.

INSTALLATION IRON

Staying on track

Experts say when selecting a piece of equipment with tires or tracks, it comes down to use

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

In construction equipment, choosing a machine with tires or tracks should come down to its desired use.

“It’s about where they’re using the machine and what they are going to do with it that’s going to dictate whether they are going to use tires or tracks,” says Matt Lombardi, turf, commercial and governmental sales for

TriGreen Equipment in Huntsville, Ala.

To help understand which piece of equipment best fits a company’s needs, *Landscape Management* talked to Lombardi; Kory Lamphear, owner of Lamphear’s Lawn Service in Medina, Ohio; and Anthony Natale, general manager of Turf Management Services in Erie, Pa.

TRACK AHEAD

Tracked machines can perform work in tough conditions since they displace pressure over more surface area.



Lamphear says his company switched to tracked machines seven years ago and has been able to work on more sites in less than ideal weather with the tracked machines than with equipment with tires.

“Our tracked machines give us an additional three to four months of work that we wouldn’t be able to do with wheel machines,” he says. “We have seven tracked machines, and they run all year round.”

Lamphear’s Lawn Service offers lawn maintenance and fertilization, design/build installation and snow removal services for a 60 percent commercial and 40 percent residential clientele. Lamphear says his company schedules patio installations into winter thanks to the tracked machines, which can get into yards and move materials in snowy or slippery conditions.

“With all the different designed tracks manufacturers offer, you can get a track that works great in the dirt, the mud, the snow, on concrete — everything,” Lamphear says, noting his company has outfitted its Caterpillar equipment with tracks featuring a bar-style tread.

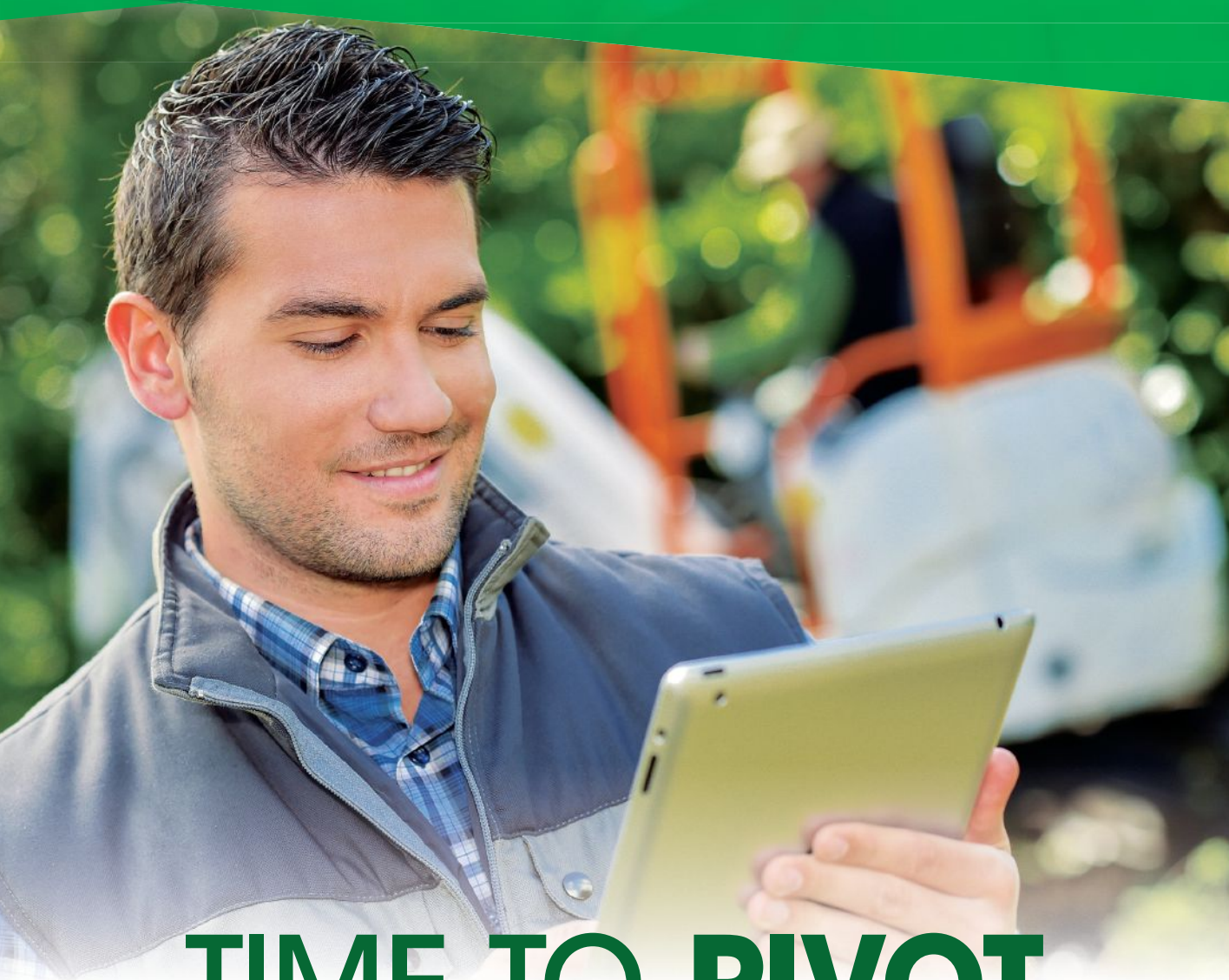
VERSATILE USES

Natale says he prefers the track-style equipment because it has a better weight displacement. Wheeled equipment, he says, is best for hard surfaces.

“As far as dirt or soils, tracks just seem to float across it because they are displacing the pressure over more surface area,” he says. “We noticed that even with heavy loads on the front of the machine, they still do a good job of staying above on the surface, even when it is wet and mucky outside.”

Turf Management Services offers lawn maintenance, design/build installation and irrigation services for a 50 percent residential and 50 percent commercial clientele and snow removal for a primarily commercial clientele.

“We use our tracked skid-steer at a condo association because it’s flat and does well with not sliding,” Natale says.



TIME TO PIVOT

How good cost data and real-time visibility help landscape companies improve their profitability

“**G**o with your gut” is often a good piece of advice in business and in life. But it’s not the best approach when it comes to pricing and selling work in the landscape industry. Surprisingly, however, that’s how many companies operate today. **Landscapers often make assumptions about costs when bidding, without clear visibility into job cost data. They fail to realize that basing their current bidding process on previous job data creates inaccuracies, causing them to consistently leave profits on the table.**

Ultimately, the goal is to have accurate, real-time data so you can quickly pivot if you detect a problem, says Aspire Senior Implementation Manager Jon Gohl.

“

With software, (managers) can see how they performed last week on their weekly mowing visits—or any project for that matter.”

Jon Gohl

“For companies that do understand these costs, with software they can see how they performed last week on their weekly mowing visits—or any project for that matter,” he says. “If they went over on hours, for example, they can act proactively to get the project back on track. They’re able to right the ship quicker because they can see what’s happening now vs. finding out at the end of the process what went wrong.”

The top two cost areas where landscapers can improve their profitability using software are labor and materials, according to Kory Beidler, solutions engineer for Aspire Software.

Labor cost visibility

Composite labor rate is one area where landscapers often rely on their perceptions rather than data, Beidler says.

“You have to know what your average labor rate is with burden for the different areas of your business,” he says. “A lot of companies don’t fully understand these costs.”

For example, a landscape company may say its average labor cost is \$17 per hour. But the owner doesn’t have a handle on whether that really means \$15.50 for maintenance and \$18.50 for construction. Those nuances can play a big role in determining whether you win a bid or if a job is profitable in the end.

Ideally, your software program will allow for multiple labor rates, including built-in markups, when estimating.

Pivot Points

“When you’re running a landscape business, you’re trying to stay on track with budgeting your labor hours throughout the month. With Aspire, the day you do the work, the data is right at your fingertips so you can adjust course if needed throughout the month.”



JANET DAVOLI

Janet Davoli
Chief Technology Officer,
The Greenery

“One of the greatest benefits Aspire has provided is enabling us to see our results in real time versus having to wait until the end of the month to see where we landed. To know where you’re standing at any given time is a tremendous advantage.”



DAVID TRIBBLE

David Tribble
Aspire Director,
HeartLand

“With Aspire, I have a great pulse on how we’re doing as a company within five to 10 minutes. I can dive in to see what’s going on and connect with the people I need to. Aspire allows you to watch your costs and to really know your numbers.”



BRIAN DUMONT

Brian DuMont
President & CEO,
Yard-Nique

“

There's never a better time to fix a problem than the moment you're in. Yesterday's gone and tomorrow's too late.

Gage Roberts

“In a business management platform like Aspire, when you put together a bid for any division, it's going to adhere to the profitability rates you've set for your company,” Beidler says. “Some guys talk about 50 percent gross margin. My question is, ‘Does that actually give you the profit you want for that estimate?’ Many will say ‘I've always done 50 percent and we've been okay.’ Well, you're okay, but you're only making 4, 5, or 6 percent net profit. You should be making 10, 11, or 12 percent, so you're leaving money on the table.”

Charging “what the market will bear” rather than factoring in your actual labor costs is another pitfall Beidler has observed.

“Whatever that number is, if you're just using these perceived competitive market rates without having real-time job cost performance data to know whether you're pricing your work profitably, it's potentially costing you money,” he says. “You may as well not do the work if you're not going to be profitable.”

Material cost visibility

When it comes to material costs, many landscape companies rely on in-house spreadsheets, supplier catalogs, or ballpark costs when estimating. The problem with this approach is material prices often change more frequently than landscape companies' internal price lists.

A software program like Aspire that captures

your material purchasing costs eliminates the need to look up prices and manually enter them, Beidler explains.

“When you do material purchasing in Aspire, the system is learning your purchases,” he says. “As you buy and confirm vendor invoices, it knows you paid \$22 per plant or whatever the case may be. We have a button that allows you update your costs to reflect what you're actually paying for this stuff.”

Real-time changes

Once you know the labor and material costs are accurate in your system, the next step is tracking the job cost performance data and using it to make proactive business decisions.

“One thing Aspire does very well—and what drives a lot of profitability for our clients—is showing estimated vs. actual costs all the way down to the service-line level,” says Gage Roberts, senior sales consultant for Aspire. “With mowing contracts, specifically, hours are huge. You have to manage estimated vs. actual hours granularly.”

The ability to access this data in real time is the key, Aspire experts say.

“You don't want to wait to have folks in the office crunching numbers on paper,” Roberts says. “You also don't want to have to tell the system to query things or run a report. In business management software like Aspire, you

simply click on it and it's there."

In Aspire, key information is also available in dashboards that allow managers to pivot if necessary.

"I can look at the data and say, 'Wow, we're losing on this job every week—maybe we shouldn't re-sign it, or maybe we need to raise the price because we're consistently going over hours,'" Gohl says. "When you really know what you need to charge, you understand when it's time to walk away from a job vs. losing money on it or how low you can drop the price and still make a profit."

Roberts agrees that the ability to access and analyze information so you know if—or when—to change course is the primary benefit of a software system like Aspire.

"If you're waiting till the end of the job or the year to figure out if you're doing things well, you're already past the point when you can make decisions to improve," he says. "On the other

hand, if you can do that while a job is in progress, you can still take action to change the direction of the job. There's never a better time to fix a problem than the moment you're in. Yesterday's gone and tomorrow's too late."

Consistency pays off

The benefits of user-friendly software extend beyond costs and profitability.

"It helps ensure consistent estimating across the board, which allows you to scale and think outside the box when it comes to hiring," Gohl says. "In my former life working for a landscape company, we hired a guy from Enterprise Rent-A-Car who had great sales and customer service skills. He didn't know anything about the industry, but we could teach him how to measure and because we knew the costs were right in our estimating system, we knew his estimates would be assembled correctly."



The Aspire landscape management platform offers the cloud-based, end-to-end functionality contractors need to gain full visibility into their business, make better decisions, and increase profit margins. **Aspire is trusted by more than 34,000 users in over 800 locations to manage nearly \$3 billion in industry revenue.**

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INSTALLATION SOLUTIONS



Anthony Natale

Natale says his crews are happy with the mini skid-steer and often use it for lifting heavier material.

“I always tell them, ‘work smarter not harder,’” he says. “That machine makes them able to work a lot smarter. It’s like our Swiss Army knife. If they could use it to feed them breakfast in the morning, they would. (They use it for) anything and everything you can think of.”

UNDERSTAND COST

Lamphear says he leases his equipment and will transition his last three with tires to all tracked equipment after his next lease is up. Before purchasing a piece of equipment, he says it’s critical to try the piece of equipment first.

“I would highly suggest they demo them or (do a) long-term rent and actually use them,” he says. “Once they get them out on the jobs and start using them, there won’t be any question about spending the extra money to get them.”

Lombardi owned a landscape company for eight years, and that experience on the other side of the fence helps him understand his customers’ needs. He says it’s important to consider all aspects of the equipment: maintenance, lifting capacity, horsepower and financing options.



Matt Lombardi

“Maintenance and repairs on the undercarriage are a little bit more costly with tracks than tires because now they’re using solid tires,” he says. “The cost of ownership, the fuel consumption, the repair schedule and the warranty are keys to how I sell our equipment.”

“They all lift and move and distribute, so, a lot of times, it’s a matter of what is that service after that sale?” he adds. “What is the cost of ownership? What is the finance program? Can I qualify? What is my payment going to be? (Those factors come) down to being more important than which machine they get.”



Chainsaw expert says it’s time for landscape pros to reconsider low-kickback chains

BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

The Consumer Product Safety Commission reports about 40,000 injuries from chainsaws a year. Even the most grizzled landscape professional needs to be aware of the risks involved in using these machines, including some recent improvements, says Eddie Anderson, technical training adviser for Stihl.

“A chainsaw is a serious machine — it’s not a knife; it’s a shredder,” he says. “We really push hard to make information available (to customers). The instruction manual and our website has a ton of information on best practices and the various options.”

Anderson says one option that professionals ignored 10 years ago has advanced so much that it deserves a second look today: a low-kickback chain.

“Back in the day, a low-kickback chain didn’t plunge cut well, or as fast, as a chain that was other than low kickback,” Anderson says. “Professional users didn’t like it, but the technology that Stihl has invested in this chain, we have some green-labeled low-kickback chains that

operate as well as any other chain.”

When talking about new chainsaws, Anderson is

excited about the company’s recent launch of the Stihl MS500i, which he says has the highest power to weight ratio of any chainsaw that’s ever been sold. Anderson advises chainsaw operators to brush up on their chainsaw knowledge frequently, especially after purchasing a new saw in order to fully understand its functions.

“We have a reduced-kickback guide bar, low-kickback chains and then of course the chain break, so there’s three levels of things operators can do to their Stihl chainsaw to help mitigate the reactive force that could occur if they have a kickback situation,” Anderson says. “If an operator has a low-kickback chain, he’s got a chainsaw that’s equipped with a functional chain break, he’s wearing a helmet and chaps ... if things get crazy, he is most likely going to walk away. Wearing personal protection equipment and knowing how your equipment works, that is where it all comes together.”

SAFE SAWS
Low-kickback chains, which have advanced in recent years, can help prevent operator injury.

RECOMMENDER

What equipment do you use for **moving material** on a job site?

Implementing equipment to help move material can save on labor and help prevent strain injuries.



RYAN KUHN
PRESIDENT
TOWN & COUNTRY
LAWN SERVICE
HARTFORD, WIS.

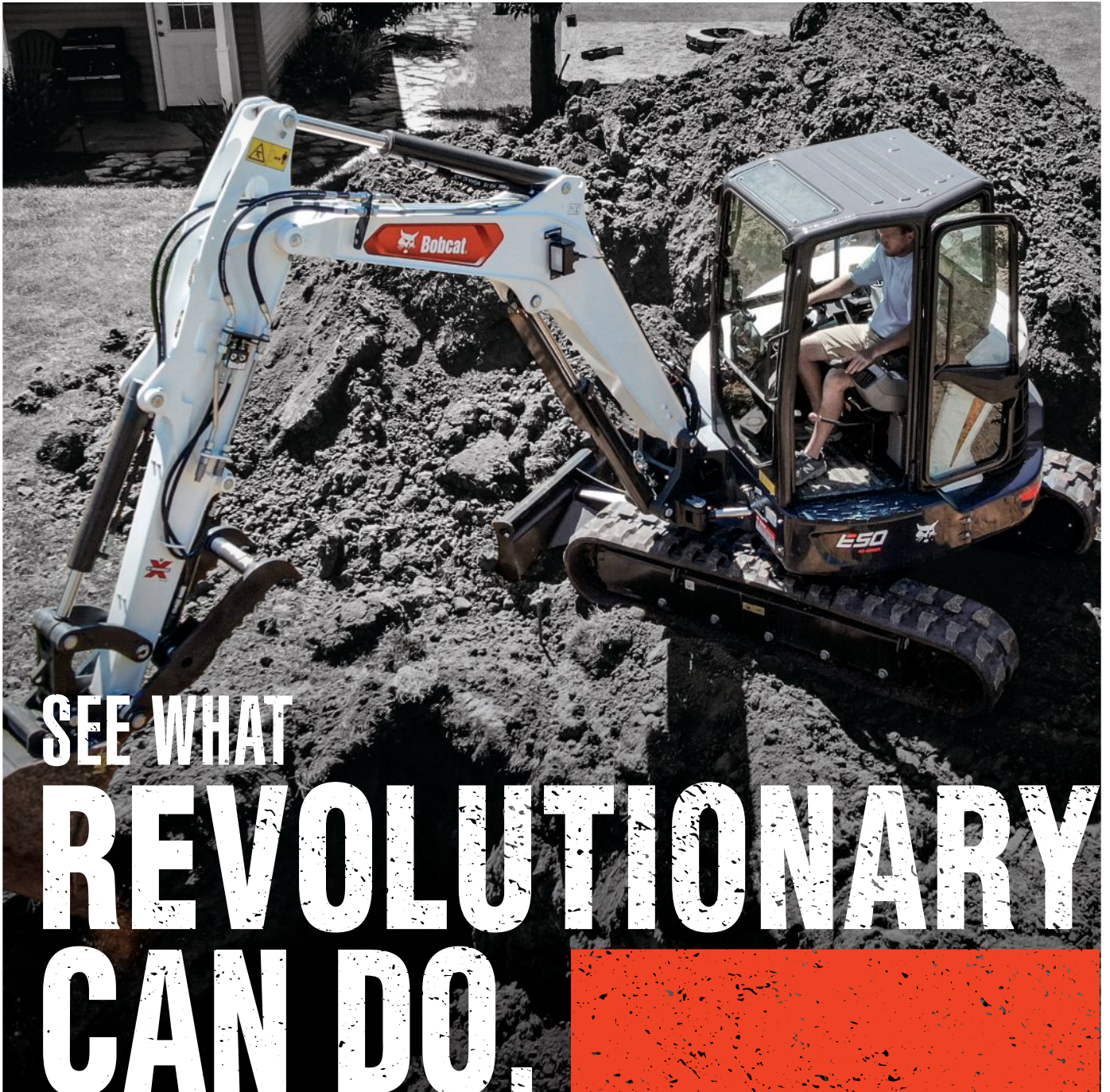
“We use mulch, topsoil, river stone, granite — we’ve used all that and utilized the **Mulch Mate** on different jobs because it allows you to unload it so fast. Instead of doing the physical labor (of loading material), this saves a lot of time and obviously labor. We can do 6 tons in a truck and unload it in 25 minutes. The turnaround time on completing jobs is a lot faster. I was one of the first companies to place an order when Mulch Mate first started three years ago. I thought, after the first year, it paid for itself because my guys were happy they weren’t shoveling material twice. The feedback was great from them, and it made the job more fun and easier.”



STEVE GIPE
PRESIDENT
CUTTING EDGE LAWN SERVICE
MYERSTOWN, PA.

“Instead of a guy in the back pushing and filling wheelbarrows, by pushing a button, you’re filling your truck. There’s nothing worse than shoveling stones out of a dump truck. By running a **Smart Gate**, we’re cutting down our time considerably. Smart Gate has a remote control that has a hook to it. We hook it onto the back of the truck, and the next guy presses a button, fills their wheelbarrow and goes. If you can press a button, you can operate it. We have one that’s installed on a hydraulic truck, and we use it for our mulch, stone and topsoil.”

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WATER WORLD

An empowering improvement

LOCATION Colorado Springs, Colo.

COMPANY Weisburg Landscape Maintenance

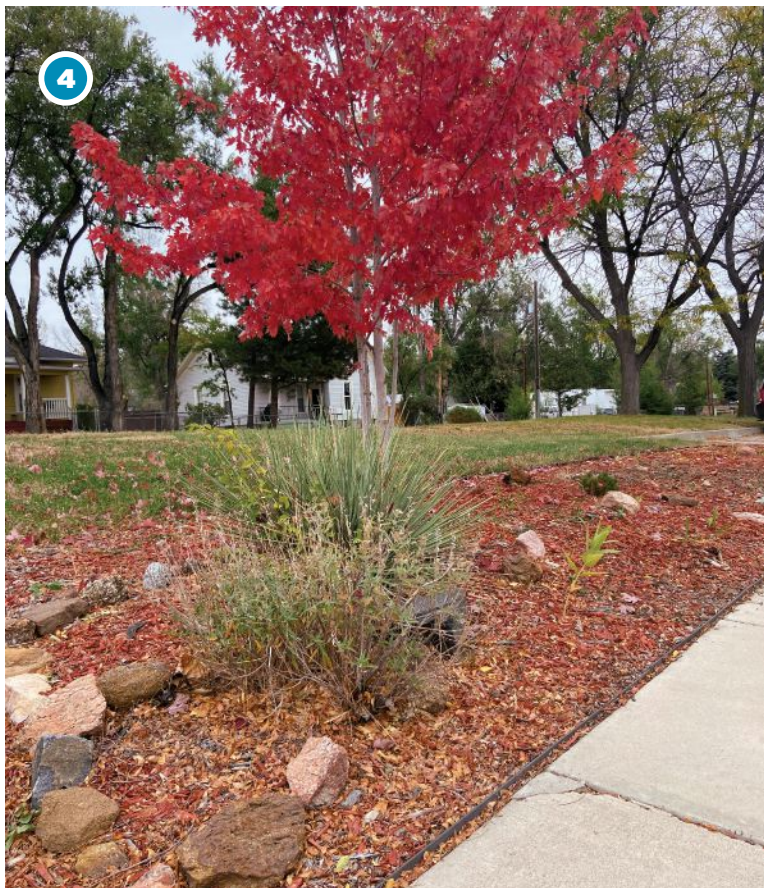
DETAILS The client was a small Catholic high school. The irrigation heads on the property were old and malfunctioning, spraying water everywhere and creating puddles in the turf. Weisburg Landscape Maintenance got a referral for the project from another irrigation company. Eric Moroski, vice president and co-owner, surveyed the irrigation system and found it was installed in 1968. The system had wiring issues, all the valves were directly buried in dirt with no valve boxes and some valves were failing.

Moroski worked with 15 student and parent volunteers from the school to dig up the 143 pop-up sprayheads, three quarters of which were original Rain Bird and Weathermatic metal heads with custom-welded copper risers. He and another tech-savvy volunteer installed new heads.

Now, the site runs a Wi-Fi controller to irrigate nine zones. The Weisburg team took advantage of rebates from Colorado Springs Utilities, which provides money back for changing outdated irrigation to smart, water-conserving technology. The rebates covered \$2,717, and Moroski says the company repaired the system for 5 to 10 percent of the cost of a new one.

“It was a neat partnership,” Moroski says. “I volunteered a lot of my time, the rebates are going to pay for the equipment and the volunteers who go to the school or whose kids go to the school feel empowered and more tied to the school.”

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



PHOTOS: WEISBURG LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE



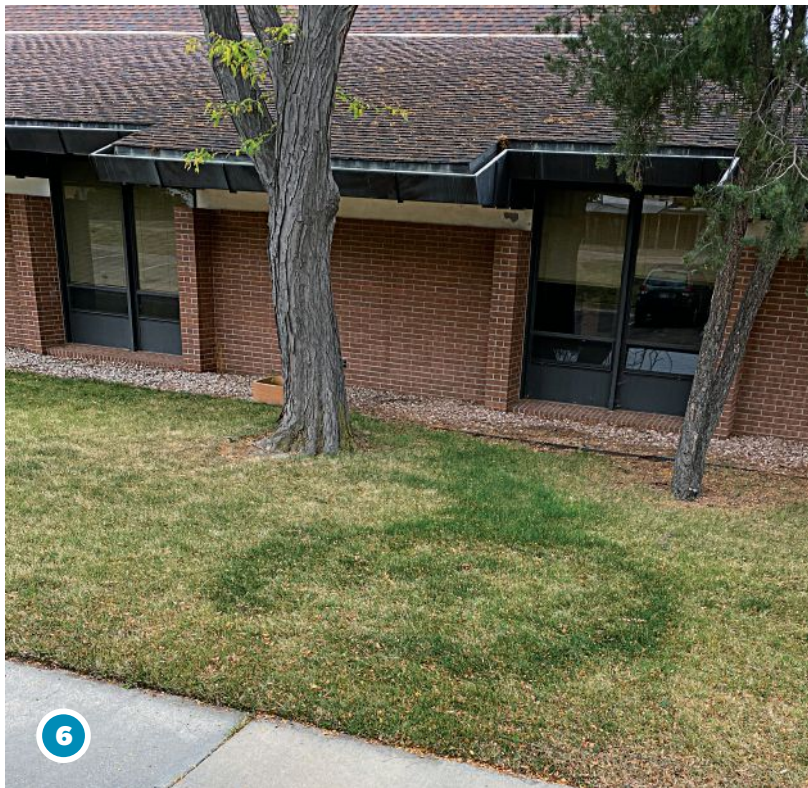
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Captions | 1. Sprinkler heads were installed every 15 feet along this walkway. 2. Weisburg Landscape Maintenance uncovered a leaky drain and exposed the copper mainline, which has remained intact despite its age. 3. Fifteen student and parent volunteers dig up the 143 original irrigation sprinkler heads on the property. 4. This red mulched bed had malfunctioning sprinklers. In spring 2021, the Weisburg team plans to renovate the bed and run drip irrigation. 5. An original Weathermatic sprinkler head from 1968, with custom welding. 6. Fairy ring damage was present on the site's turf due to the faulty irrigation system.

PRODUCTS THAT WORK

Sensors



RAIN BIRD MJ100B FLOW SENSOR

COMPANY: Rain Bird Corp.
URL: RainBird.com

Rain Bird's MJ100B Flow Sensor is a simplified, affordable flow-sensing option that can save water and prevent property damage at residential sites. When combined with the ESP-ME3 controller, the MJ100B learns appropriate flow rates in each zone while constantly monitoring for low-flow and excess-flow conditions caused by broken lines or heads. When the sensor detects a problem, it communicates with the ESP-ME3 to automatically shut down the affected area while continuing to water unaffected areas.

RAIN SENSOR

COMPANY: SmartRain
URL:

SmartRain.net
Rain sensors are a great line of defense against wasteful watering.

Smart Rain offers different types of rain sensors, including wireless and wired options. Whichever users choose, these sensors will help them save water and money by suspending the irrigation controller when there is an adequate amount of rainfall received, according to the company. Smart Rain can also use tipping rain gauges to incorporate actual rainfall amounts into ET watering schedules to provide maximum efficiency and savings.



CENTRALUS IRRIGATION MANAGEMENT PLATFORM WITH SOLAR SYNC SENSOR

COMPANY: Hunter Industries
URL: HunterIndustries.com

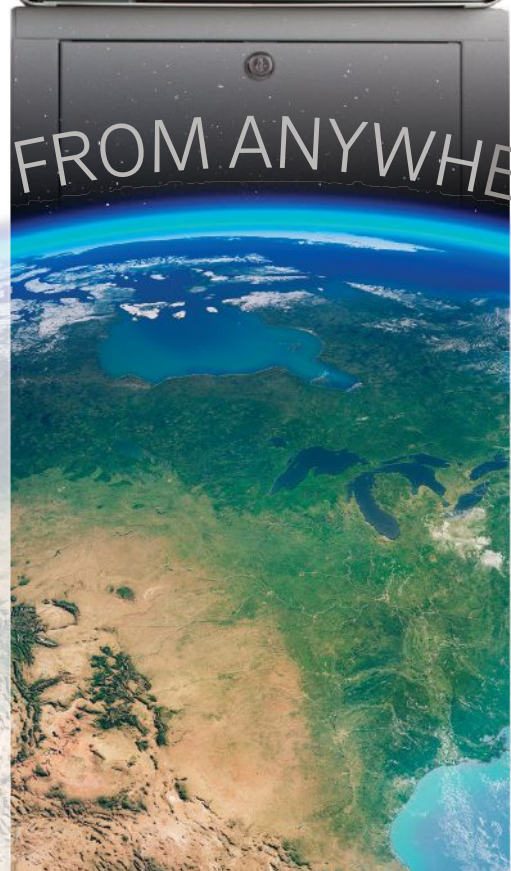
Hunter's Centralus irrigation management platform — currently available in the beta phase — provides secure, comprehensive cloud-based control and monitoring features to new or existing ICC2 dial-based controllers and ACC2 controllers. The connectivity allows users to view a controller's status, change settings, view forecasts, receive instant notifications and save water with built-in Solar Sync logic — all without costly and time-consuming site visits. The Solar Sync ET sensor is an advanced weather sensor that calculates evapotranspiration (ET) and adjusts Hunter controllers daily based on local weather conditions.



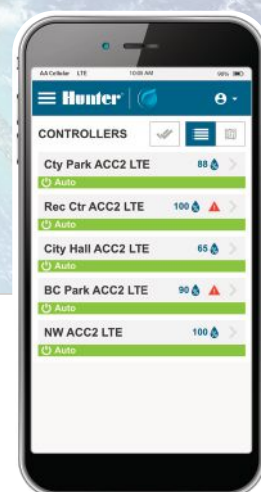
K-RAIN UNIVERSAL WIRELESS RAIN/FREEZE SENSOR

COMPANY: K-Rain
URL: KRain.com

The K-Rain Universal Wireless Rain/Freeze Sensor turns any manufacturer's controller into a wireless water manager. The model 3208-UWRFS provides a cost-efficient option to add wireless rain sensor technology to most irrigation systems. It features quick and easy installation (standard flat and gutter mounting); it's maintenance free — no battery replacement is needed; and it prevents the system from starting when temperatures drop to 37 degrees F or below.



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FIVE QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Nate Moses

PRESIDENT
PRECISION LANDSCAPE
GREENVILLE, S.C.

1 What would you like to tell us about Precision Landscape?

We're primarily a residential services contractor based in Greenville, S.C. We offer landscape design/build, landscape maintenance, lawn care and tree and shrub care. Today, we have a staff of 37 team members. The company was founded in 2010 ... I was young and working for a phenomenal landscape company, but I wanted to do my own thing. I thought I could do some things better. I struck off on my own, and boy, have I learned a lot since!

2 What's your 2020 been like?

It's definitely been a challenge. I knew early on that it would be a challenge to our leadership abilities to be able to lead through something like this. We are a fairly young team and we underestimated the psychological challenges we would face. Everyone's been stuck indoors and not able to socialize as much; our team members can't travel to see their extended families. We saw that a lot of our team members didn't take vacation this year. Like anyone who works hard for several months without a break, that builds tension. We should have better anticipated that as we struggle as a country, we'll also struggle as individuals.

3 What are some trends in your area that you have your eye on?

I like to look to some of the more progressive states — like New York, California — and see the trends that they are facing. In our community, we're five or 10 years behind those trends. We've just started seeing electric equipment come here, and we're seeing a few robotic mowers. We brought on an arborist this year so that we could move into the tree and shrub care sector, the plant health care side. This is allowing us to compete in a sector that we weren't able to previously, as clients in our area like to work with one company for all their outdoor needs.

4 Do you read much, and what are some of your favorite books?

I wasn't a big reader until the last couple years. I learned that you must constantly be challenging yourself and learning. I now read at least one book a month by reading five to 20 pages every morning. My favorite books are "Traction: Get a Grip on Your Business" — which has been really helpful for our business. Another one is "The Ultimate Blueprint for an Insanely Successful Business." It's about knowing your numbers and what you can do to set your company up for long-term success. Another is "Leadership and Self-Deception." It challenges the way that we view people and how we can improve our lives by changing our outlook on others.

5 What's been the best vacation you've ever taken?

We went to New York City in September of 2019 — we loved the city vibe. For us, we really enjoyed that time together and getting to experience so many iconic things. I'm a very restless person, and we managed to fit everything into our seven-day trip. We mapped out each day and accomplished a lot. The most memorable thing we did was we got to see Queen perform live in Central Park. They had a charitable concert with tons of great performers. Queen is one of our favorite bands. We were riding our bikes through Central Park the day before the event, and we heard the band playing over the loudspeakers. We followed the noise and talked to an event staff person and he said, "Haven't you heard? There's a big concert going on!" My wife said we're here, there's no way we're not going. 🎧

BEST ADVICE

"Don't try to be Superman in your business. When you're the owner and you've built the team, you may feel like you have to be all things to all people and on top of everything. That mentality will hold you and your company back from growth as your company matures. Look to key people to delegate responsibility to; it can be empowering to them and yourself."



PHOTO: LOU FERRARO

A LOOK BACK



Space-age technology for irrigation controls

Solid state technology, which has revolutionized communications, aerospace, finance, medicine and a host of other fields, has effected a major breakthrough in irrigation system controllers. For the first time, a controller, developed by Rockwell International for Johns Manville, utilizes a microprocessor for regulating a wide range of irrigation processes and a calculator-type keyboard that, with a human input/output interface, feeds instructions, changes and programming to the controller. Also included is a digital display that indicates at a glance the time of day, the type of sequence, which station is operating, the time remaining and many other functions. The controller was deliberately designed with a "mushroom"-like appearance so that it blends with the environment in which it is utilized.

The solid state design of the Model KCS (Keyboard Controller Series) offers several important advantages over comparable electromechanical units. For example, reliability is better because less circuitry is needed, a feature that reduces the possibility of malfunctions. Due to the fact that the controller has one basic component, the microprocessor, instead of the multiple number of parts required in an electromechanical model, dependability is further enhanced.

Flexibility is another benefit afforded by the controller. Despite its relatively small size, the transistorized microprocessor has the capacity for servicing up to 24 stations with a diverse number of functions. To illustrate, starting can be programmed in various ways — automatic, manual and even manual starting of a single station on a one-time basis.

Accuracy also is upgraded. The solid state design assures a station timing accuracy of $\pm .01$ of a second. Water conservation is improved because the precise timing allows the operator to put down the exact amount of water required. For the same circumstances, the accuracy of electromechanical units can vary by as much as 20 percent.

Although station timing settings are normally regulated in minutes, the controller has the capability of switching to hour station times with the implementation of a toggle switch. Also, the time base is automatically compensated for the appropriate electrical frequency — 60 Hertz for domestic use, or 50 Hertz for foreign applications.

The microprocessor can handle four, 14-day schedules. Each station has the ability to operate with any one of the schedules. In this way, lawns and shrubs, as well as trees, trees and lawns, can be watered on completely different programs on the same or different days of the same controller.

Other programs that can be accommodated by the versatile controller include:

- **Skip Days** — the irrigation cycle can be skipped from one to nine days, an ideal situation during rainy weather when irrigation is not necessary. The KCS will automatically resume the proper sequence at the conclusion of the skip period. The controller can be used in conjunction with a rain gauge which tells how much rain has fallen, daily or year to date, to determine if irrigation is warranted.
- **Automatic Syringe** — for cooling and disease control, a syringe cycle, with variable time, can be started independently of the normal irrigation program for all or pre-selected stations.
- **Multiple Repeat** — the number of repeats after initial irrigation can be set from one through nine. A delay between repeats of up to 99 minutes can be selected when a single station is repeating. The number of repeats are common to all stations programmed for this cycle. This feature prevents run-off on steep slopes.
- **Other keyboard entries** permit the controller to . . .

manually operate a station from 1 minutes to 99 minutes. This manual mode may interrupt a current sequence which shall resume without a time loss to the stations interrupted.

manually start or stop any sequence that would include all stations whether they are scheduled for that day or not.

manually start a sequence that would include stations scheduled for that day only.

recycle, on a continuing basis, the current or next start sequence — an important feature for grass seed germination periods, calculate the total time for any irrigation sequence of any day including repeat time. This helps irrigation cycle scheduling so that it doesn't interfere with other activities.

20 WEEDS TREES & TURF/AUGUST 1977

Space-aged irrigation technology

Irrigation technology has come a long way, as you can see from this August 1977 feature on "Space-age technology for irrigation controls" from *Weeds, Trees and Turf* (the former name of *LM*).

This article shows how an irrigation system developed by Rockwell International for the Johns Manville corporation was the first to use a microprocessor in its controls. Even back in 1977, this Model Keyboard Controller Series could service up to 24 stations and handle four, 14-day schedules.

This controller included a calculator-type keyboard to program the device. Other notable features include skip days, an automatic syringe for cooling and disease control. Another bonus is the deliberate "mushroom" appearance to blend in with the landscape surrounding the device.

PHOTO: LM ARCHIVES

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BY DANIEL GORDON

The author is a CPA who caters to lawn care operators and landscape contractors. He can be reached at dan@turfbooks.com.

How do we plan for a rising tax environment?

With the government pumping trillions of dollars into the economy to deal with COVID-19, who do we think will pay for it? Without getting political here, we all will — through increased taxes. It doesn't matter who wins the election in November; taxes are going up.

In fact, Joe Biden already has proposed raising taxes, and while Donald Trump is still in tax-cutting and deferral mode, I refer you to George H. W. Bush, who famously said, "Read my lips: No new taxes." I truly believe Bush had no intention of raising taxes but was forced into it by the situation. While I'm sure Trump feels the same way, it may be beyond his control. For purposes of this article, let's suppose I'm right. What do we do in a rising tax environment? How do we plan?

As the saying goes, the only two certainties in life are death and

“As the saying goes, the only two certainties in life are death and taxes.”

taxes. Conventional wisdom tells us to defer both death and taxes for as long as possible. But, over the past couple of decades, the individual tax rate has trended downward.

Deferring taxes in an environment where rates are either remaining constant or falling makes sense. At the minimum, you hold on to your money longer, capitalizing on the time value of the money. Or, if rates fall, the deferral lets you take advantage of the lower rate when you recognize the income for tax purposes.

So, is this type of wisdom relevant when taxes are rising? The answer is no. Deferring taxes is not a good strategy in periods of rising rates.

Let's look at an example. Assume you can make a profit of \$100 on a

job you have a choice to do in 2020 or 2021. Let's also assume that you are in a 32 percent marginal tax bracket. Let's assume this marginal rate goes up to 37 percent in 2021. That would mean you'll pay an additional \$5 in taxes in 2021. Here, it would make sense to do that job in 2020 and not defer it until 2021.

Effective tax planning is really a business decision predicated on two factors. First, do we want to minimize our taxes? And second, if minimizing our taxes means paying taxes sooner rather than later, do we have the funds to pay the taxes currently?

Here are two tax planning ideas that are relevant in a rising tax environment:

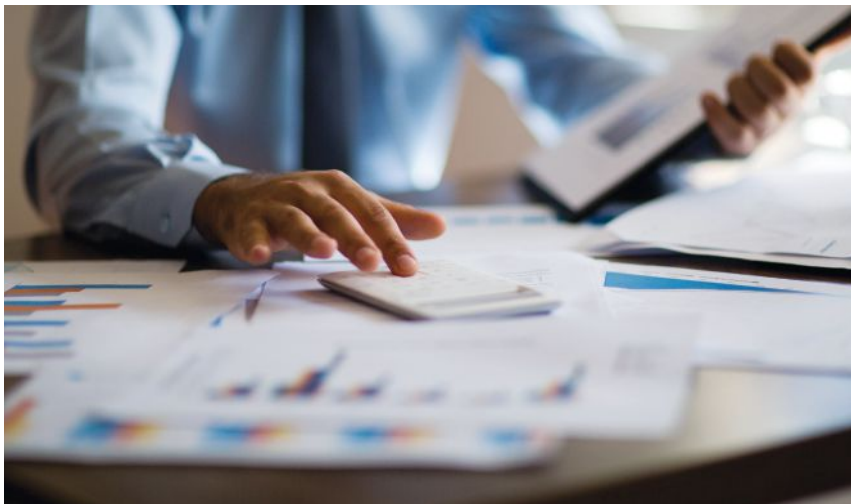
1 Choosing not to defer income.

If you're planning a large design/build job or some other big-ticket service, you're better off performing that job sooner rather than later if you're expecting the tax rates to rise. If you're a cash-basis taxpayer, you will need to be paid prior to the rate increase date.

2 Deferring expenses.

Where you have the option of deferring an expense into the period where tax rates are rising, you should consider this. Deferring expenses has the exact opposite effect as deferring income, meaning if those expenses are taken when tax rates are higher, you'll shield more of your income from taxes.

Winter is usually when we start to think about taxes, and this year, we should think about the future tax increase environment that seems inevitable in this country.



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BY KEN THOMAS

The author is principal of Envisor Consulting. Reach him at kenthomas@envisorco.com.

Leading forward

The end of any year is a good time to learn from the past and look to the future. The year 2020 will surely be one for the history books. Over the last few years, when Envisor would sit down with our clients to facilitate their strategic planning sessions, we looked to 2020 as a somewhat symbolic milestone. The year 2020, to us, represented the need for clarity. In a reference to 20/20 optical perfection, we worked with our clients to help them clearly envision their future and build a focused plan to get there ... or here, as it is now.

As part of those planning sessions we analyzed strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats (also known as a SWOT analysis). In the threats section, we always listed labor pool, weather, economic cycles and even geopolitical issues as potential obstacles to success. For some reason, we never listed a pandemic as a threat. Who would've think?

The impact of the pandemic has been broad and diverse for all of us, both professionally and personally. As business leaders and humans, we've wrestled with emotions that have

“Our industry has held up pretty well, and the future is bright before us.”

affected the way we live. On the downside, these emotions have included fear, anxiety, anger and even depression. On the positive side, we've experienced relief, hope for the future and a sense of gratitude. We've all responded differently based on our individual personalities and circumstances.

So, where do we go from here, and what's our role as individuals and as leaders to move ourselves, our businesses and our families forward?

For me, it starts with a recalibration of sorts. This year, more than ever, strong leadership is needed. This is the time of year when we tweak our vision for the next five years, personally and professionally, fine-tune our long-term strategic road map and lay out our tactical initiatives that will make 2021 and beyond wildly successful.

Effective leaders are always looking ahead, so they can lead the way.

They don't stop thinking about the future. They learn from the past, and they never stop planning for success. To prepare for the next season of life and business, here are a few recommendations for leaders at home or at the office. Deep breath ... ready?

1 Check yourself.

Take a good look in the mirror and ask yourself if you're standing on solid ground. Is anything holding you back personally? What

do you need to do to prepare yourself to lead? Do you need an attitude check? A lifestyle change? Do you need to clear the air and or mend any relationships to lead from a position of strength? As the airlines say, “Put the oxygen mask on yourself before you try to help others.”

2 Finish strong. 2020 is not over! The hardest gains in any endeavor come from a drive through the finish line. The last 100 yards, the last 5 pounds, the final 1 percent of profit. Rally yourself and your team to win the year.

3 Look to the future. Great leaders are always looking ahead and identifying or refocusing on the target. Leaders paint the picture for future success and work to inspire their teams to move forward.

4 Build a plan. Leaders lay the rails that lead the organization toward its greater success. Gather the team, develop the road map and assign accountabilities. Be the leader.

5 Consider your legacy. Remember, your actions as a leader are powerful and impact lives more than you know. Choose your approach carefully and make a positive difference in the lives of those around you.

2020 has been tough but not all bad. For some of us, this year, with all of its twists and turns, may turn out to be the most transformative year of our businesses and our lives. As we look in the rearview mirror, let's take inventory of what we learned and how we reacted as leaders and as a team. Our industry has held up pretty well and the future is bright before us. Now, check out the road ahead, get after it and lead forward! 🚗



FRONT OF MIND, ALL THE TIME

BY SARAH WEBB | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

1,894 days — that's how long David J. Frank Landscape Contracting (DJFLC) in Germantown, Wis., has gone without a safety incident (as of press time).

DJFLC ranked at No. 92 on the 2020 LM150 list with \$25.8 million in 2019 revenue and achieved a 2020 Silver Overall Safety Achievement Award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals. Donna Landon, teaching and resources officer, and David R. Frank, CEO, share how DJFLC has built a safety culture.

1 Empower team members to follow safety protocols.

"Whether you've been here one day or 41 years, like our most senior team member has, everyone is at the same level with safety," Frank says. "Everyone has the authority to say, 'Hey, stop, this doesn't look safe.'"

2 Incorporate year-round safety trainings.

About 15 to 20 supervisors and managers attend the company's monthly safety meetings, along with the company's insurance agent. Supervisors then relay information on training, near misses and more to their teams.



3 Be prepared to pivot.

"We had to take over the weekly safety talks numerous times to implement COVID-19 safety practices,"

Frank says.

DJFLC has made COVID-19 the topic of several of its safety meetings.

4 Lead by example.

"If we think safety is for someone else, and it's not woven into the company, people aren't going to feel like they should be reporting (safety hazards)," Landon says. "To encourage reporting, build trust with employees so they're not discouraged or feel like they'll be penalized."

5 Note that safety is ongoing.


"It's not just one day a week or only at the safety talk," Landon says. "It's every day, and it's not going away. It needs to be front of mind all the time." 

PHOTO: DAVID J. FRANK/LANDSCAPE CONTRACTING

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Correction: In the October 2020 issue on p. 122, we incorrectly displayed James Young's title as CEO of Spring-Green Enterprises. He is the COO.

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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 art of saying no

We've held a number of virtual events this year, including workshops, boot camps and webinars, and we were even able to (safely) hold a couple events in person. Attendees from companies of all shapes and sizes have joined us, and one question that comes up again and again is how owners from smaller outfits can get past the \$1 million mark. The demand for landscaping work has been strong this year, and many companies are rapidly outgrowing the structures that got them to \$1 million in sales.

The first piece of advice I share with entrepreneurs approaching this milestone is this: What gets you to \$1 million is saying yes, but what gets you beyond is saying no.

As entrepreneurs, saying yes to new opportunities is in our nature. Changing my own mindset to say no to more when my business grew was one of the hardest shifts I've ever made, but we simply don't have enough time in the day to keep saying yes to every sale and task that comes our way as the business grows. With every yes comes a commitment you must be able to deliver on for your clients and for the profitability of your firm.

Here are three areas to start with to better manage time and say no to more:

SALES

Identify who your ideal client is and what types of jobs your team can be successful with. Say yes to jobs that fit your team's strengths, and say no

“What gets you to \$1 million is saying yes, but what gets you beyond is saying no.”

to the jobs that don't. Which jobs are the most profitable for you? You should be doing more of those.

Phone screening prospects helps sales people save time, and if a client isn't a good fit, you can gently tell them, “I'm sorry, we don't do that type of work anymore,” or “I'm sorry, I don't think our company is going to be a good fit for this project.”

By screening your sales and keeping your focus on more profitable work, you're building a portfolio of work and clients that will help you continue to scale up.

PRODUCTION

As a company grows beyond \$1 million, it becomes much more difficult for the owner to have eyes on every property. Instead, training teams and trusting them to do the work well is vital. Many companies accomplish this feat by standardizing their work: They train their team members to do different tasks the same way. Training is an investment, not an expense.

TO-DO LIST

When I was younger, I felt bad about delegating my work to someone else because I felt like I was dumping tasks on them. I've learned that our team members want to take on more

responsibilities, and empowering our teams helps all of us.

If you have too much on your plate but aren't sure what to pass off, start by making a list of the important tasks you do. Then evaluate the list: What tasks could someone else do as good or better than you can? If you can empower someone to own something that you weren't great at, you double effectiveness. That weakness you had could be a strength for someone else, and now you get extra time each week to do more of the things you are great at.

Support your team members as they take on their newly assigned tasks. Communicate your expectations, train them in the skills they need and make yourself available for questions or support as they need it.

When you reach important milestones like this one, celebrate. Don't let stress about the future overshadow the huge accomplishment that this is. You and your team have made it this far, and there is a bright future ahead for your company. Show your appreciation to your team, celebrate your wins and then get to work preparing for even more success. No one accomplishes the best things in life alone. It takes a team focused on the most profitable clients and their happiness. 🎉

It's a great time of year to invest in training for yourself or for your team to prepare for a strong 2021. We have a full slate of upcoming virtual and in-person events. Learn more and register on our website: [GrowGroupInc.com/upcoming-events](https://www.growgroupinc.com/upcoming-events).

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