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What do you want to see more of?

As we enter the last segment of 2021, we want input from you, our readers, on what you would like to see in the coming months of 2022 and beyond. Let us know what topics interest you and what you'd like to see more of, and you may be included in an upcoming story.

Please contact LM Editor Christina Herrick at cherrick@northcoastmedia.net with any story ideas you may have.



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2022 and beyond

It's a great feeling to put a bow on the 2021 season by wrapping up the December issue of *LM*. I hope you and your families and your crews were able to celebrate the holidays and appreciate each other, and the hard work that everyone put in to making 2021 a success.

Here at the Jones household, we welcomed almost 20 people to our home for a fantastic Thanksgiving dinner. The weather was abnormally warm so most of the guys stayed outside and watched football while the kids chased each other around the yard shooting Nerf dart guns at each other. It was just about perfect.

Then it was back to reality and we got to cranking on the magazine you hold in your hands (or perhaps read on your screen). The team and I utilized a broad range of industry experts to assemble this issue. We needed a big group because we set out on a big project: we wanted to write about the year that was, the year that is upcoming and also what the industry might look like in 10 years, in 2032.

This idea was inspired by our friend Michael Bedell, owner of Bedell Property Management, Milford, Mich. He mentioned to our editor, Christina Herrick, that he had been pondering what the industry might look like in 10 years, and that made him think of us. He said our network of sources, columnists and our Editorial Advisory Board (EAB) would make for some interesting reading when posed the question, "what will the industry look like in 10 years?"

And you know what? He was right. We asked our EAB to tell us something that we won't be doing in 5 to 10 years (see page 6). We also asked our columnists and our multiple sources to take a longer view into the future. The vision of 2032 is sprinkled throughout this issue.

“... We wanted to write about the year that was, the year that is upcoming and also what the industry might look like in 10 years, in 2032.”

At the Accountability Creates Excellence (ACE) Discovery Event in Beaver Creek, Colo., I posed this question to a few unsuspecting attendees. I remember when I asked Jim Cali, co-founder of executive coaching firm McFarlin Stanford, this question, his first response was a simple, "wow." And then of course he went into an insightful answer, so good that I used it as the closer of our cover story, "Won't back down." (Thank you, Jim, for letting me put you on the spot.)

Since I put so many readers on the spot, it would only be fair to do the same thing to myself (albeit without the element of surprise) and make some predictions myself. Here are three things I foresee for the industry, trying

my best not to borrow from what our readers and experts already told me:

● **Just when we think we've got it all figured out, we'll have to adjust to the needs of a younger generation.**

In 10 years my kids and their friends won't just be kids anymore, they'll also be your customers. What will be the desires of today's high school kids when it comes to greenspaces and how they achieve them?

● **We'll still be feeling the effects of "The Great Resignation."** There are a whole lot of people who aren't interested in getting their hands dirty and many of them have figured out how to sustain that lifestyle. As they get older, they're not going to be too motivated to work harder.

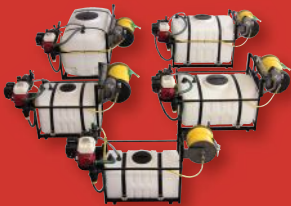
● **We'll still be making these magazines each month for you, in print and everywhere else.** Business owners will still be hungry for a magazine that reports on the specific niche they work in. As the industry evolves, it will be as important as ever to keep track of the trends and new products available now and in the future.

2032 is a ways away but it was a fun journey pondering it with our readers. If you'd like to share your predictions with us, or critique the predictions in this issue, my email address is above. We welcome the feedback.

Happy New Year. Thanks for reading in 2021. See you in 2022, and beyond! 🍷



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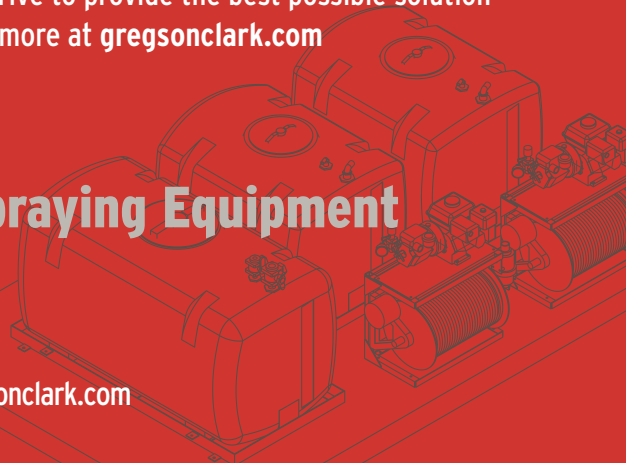


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EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD



MORE ONLINE

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

What's something you think the green industry will be doing in five years that it's not already doing?

"Managing more for customers and taking more responsibility for the entire outdoors off of people's plates."



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.



"I think the green industry will be much more focused on sustainability in the future: providing year-round careers, reducing emissions and working with nature more through design and maintenance practices."

"I am seeing more educated consumers and savvy landscape operators. This has been coupled with the general public becoming more aware of the shortage of skilled trade labor, thanks to its current impact on the broader economy."



"I see technology making a tremendous difference in many areas. Never underestimate the creativity and ingenuity of the American entrepreneur."



"Operating equipment remotely on a much broader scale."

"Robots for mowing will be common. AI computer data mining will allow better pricing, hour management and purchase decisions to max profits."



"I foresee completely virtual landscape firms without a large office or home base facility. Solar-power and fully electric equipment will become commonplace and a point of differentiation. And last, technology companies will start competing with landscape operations directly in a big way."



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LM GALLERY

Check out a few of the places where the *LM* team made its rounds recently

1 Behind the wheel *LM* Editor Christina Herrick tried her hand at a Cat equipment simulator during a recent visit to the company's Edwards Demonstration and Learning Center in Brimfield, Ill.

2 Cat-hing up Herrick (second from left) with (from left) Rick Zettler, Johanna Kelly and Sharon Holling with Cat's corporate trade press relations.

3 Dinner Date These two lovely couples were kind enough to invite *LM* to join them for dinner at the Accountability Creates Excellence (ACE) Discovery Event in Beaver Creek, Colo. From left to right, Lauren and Chap Gary, Eden Landscapes, Lafayette, La.; and Rob and Jessie Shrieve, Coastal Shores Landscape and Property Maintenance, Bluffton, S.C.

4 Honored ACE *LM* Editor-in-Chief Seth Jones (left) was happy to get a photo with John Passwaters, Passwaters Landscaping, Bridgeville, Del., after Passwaters was recognized as the ACE of the Year.

5 Perfect peer group This ACE peer group — consisting of (left to right) Nate Negrin, Southern EEZ, Charlotte; Nathan Stockman, Stockman Landscaping, Pittsburgh; Riley Rivers, Rivers Landscaping, Bozeman, Mont.; Josh Perkins, Plant Studio Landscape, Muncie, Ind.; and Matt Hyska, Backyard Creations, Bronson, Mich. — couldn't be any better. Besides helping each other grow their businesses, the group has also become great friends.

6 Coast to Coast At the ACE Discovery Event this group had plenty of big ideas about the future of the industry. From left to right are Adam Dukes, Grandscapes, Charleston, S.C.; Tim Buiten, Tim's Complete, Seattle; Marc Vetere, Manzanita Landscapes, Prescott, Ariz.; and Tim Hikade, Full Circle Lawn Care, Belford, N.J.



PHOTOS: LM STAFF (1-3, 5-6);
JOSH PERKINS (4)

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HELPING OUT HABITAT

BY SARAH WEBB | LM MANAGING EDITOR

New Jersey landscape and design services company Fullerton Grounds Maintenance (FGM) supported Morris Habitat for Humanity, a nonprofit that helps families build housing for low-income individuals and families, by allowing employees a paid day to help work on the project.

“Having home security is just so beneficial to families. Anything that involves children tugs at my heartstrings,” said Scott Fullerton, founder and CEO of FGM. “And really, when a child has a home to go to, it makes them much more successful in life. It means a lot to me because I’ve seen the benefits firsthand. It

motivates everybody who is on the worksite.”

The company also donated 12 shovels with an engraved Morris Habitat for Humanity plate riveted on them.

The largest project in Morris Habitat for Humanity’s 36-year history, the new community will be comprised of 25 units across four buildings. The community will provide much-needed affordable housing for eligible low- and moderate-income families. The project will be completed in two phases. Thirteen condominiums are expected to be completed in late 2022. An additional twelve condominiums will be constructed and finished by the end of 2023.

FGM donated shovels to help with the Habitat project.

donating plants and time.

Out of FGM’s 200 employees, Fullerton said he expects that about 20 percent of employees will pitch in.

“We do work from excavating to the final seeding of the lawn to the maintenance of the lawn, which is a substantial cost to the project that we can help minimize for them,” Fullerton said. “And we like doing it. My employees enjoy doing it. You’re doing it, obviously, for the family in need, but there’s a lot of real happiness that goes on when you do that for somebody.”

KEVIN KEHOE, ASPIRE FOUNDER RELEASES BOOK

Kevin Kehoe, founder of Aspire Software and longtime *Landscape Management* contributor, has written a book about his search for the secret “rules to life.” Kehoe said he discovered that the rules aren’t so secret, and living them is a lot harder than knowing them.

“Without taking the time to examine who and what they are and what they believe, people may shortchange themselves and miss out on the many opportunities life presents that can make one feel worthwhile and, ultimately, happy with themselves. The unexamined life is a recipe for the alternative,” Kehoe said.

Kehoe shares some truths to help readers make sense of this world. With a love for all things business, Kehoe shares some truths to help readers make sense of this world. He tells his life journey with humor and simplicity. One example is when his daughter was 7, she defiantly pronounced, “You’re not the boss of me!” He used an organizational flip chart from his consulting business to teach her, that yes, indeed, he was the boss. In his book, he teaches readers that everybody works for somebody.

In 2013, Kehoe co-founded Aspire Software based on the belief that the landscape industry needed a cloud-based mobile platform. Prior to co-founding Aspire Software, he was a nationally recognized consultant for more than 35 years, including 26 years in the landscape industry at Three Point Group. During that time Kehoe, who was widely known for his sales system and benchmarking expertise, provided practical advice to more than 250 landscape contractors in the areas of sales and financial management, budgeting and pricing as well as mergers and acquisitions.

The book is available on Aerio and Amazon Prime.



Briggs & Stratton, Husqvarna settle engine supply issue

Husqvarna Group and Briggs & Stratton have reached a settlement in regard to the supply of engines for ride-on mowers.

Under the terms of the settlement, Briggs & Stratton will provide the majority of the engines needed ahead of the 2022 season. Additionally, the parties have agreed to maintain a modified supply relationship into the 2023 season.

Husqvarna Group previously communicated a potentially negative financial impact of a \$224 million loss in 2022 as a result of a lack of engine supply. In September, Husqvarna filed a lawsuit in South Carolina to compel Briggs & Stratton to deliver all engines covered by its orders. Husqvarna has withdrawn the lawsuit with this settlement.

"We have achieved a satisfactory outcome that allows us to secure products for our customers in 2022," said Glen Instone, acting president of Husqvarna Division and CFO of the Husqvarna Group.

Sperber returns to Southern California

Sperber Landscape Cos. will partner with Bemus Landscape. The partnership marks Sperber's return to Southern California, where ValleyCrest was founded by Burt Sperber more than 70 years ago.

Headquartered in Orange County, Calif., Bemus was founded by Bill Bemus in 1973 and provides a complete solution for commercial landscape services in the areas of Orange County, San Diego and the Inland Empire.

"The Sperber partnership creates an exciting new chapter for the company my family has carefully built throughout the last six decades," said Bemus. "We have a longstanding relationship with the Sperber family, and I feel confident and comfortable joining forces with them for this next phase of Bemus' growth."

Bemus, who retired from day-to-day operations in 2017, has three sons who will continue active leadership of the company,

and, as a result of the Sperber partnership, they will now be shareholders in the company.

NALP's Leaders Forum heads to Arizona

The National Association of Landscape Professionals' (NALP) Leaders Forum, an executive-level education and networking event, will be held at The Arizona Biltmore, Jan. 19-22.

The Leaders Forum brings together landscape and lawn care CEOs and executives for leadership education, networking and peer learning. Interactive sessions will be led by experts Sean Martin, associate professor of management at University of Virginia's Darden School of Business, and Eric Karpinski, management consultant, venture capitalist and author of "Put Happiness to Work: 7 Strategies to Elevate Engagement for Optimal Performance."

The Leaders Forum is approved for Landscape Industry Certified recertification at one continuing education unit per hour of instruction attended.

RUPPERT PITCHES IN

From Nov. 11-13, 25 employees from three of Ruppert Landscape's branches located in Maryland, Washington D.C., and Virginia came together to put the finishing touches on the grounds of the Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Washington's newly renovated headquarters. This project is part of Ruppert's ongoing effort to partner with local nonprofits and industry organizations to make a real difference in the community.

"When we look for community service projects, we are looking for a project where we can utilize our landscaping skills and company resources to better our community," said Craig Ruppert, Ruppert Landscape CEO. "This project came to us through one of our board members, Julie Smith of The Bozuto Group, who has worked with the Boys & Girls Club for several years. We were happy to donate our time and talents to help enhance this campus where they are working hard to ensure that their young members achieve academic success, develop good character and live healthy lives."



Boys & Girls Clubs of Greater Washington's headquarters was renovated by Davis Construction and more than 60 other organizations. The final touch for the building and grounds was the landscape, which was in need of some attention and sprucing up. This project involved an investment of both time and materials, totaling approximately \$17,000 and consisting of 85 labor hours. To bring this project to fruition, the site was cleaned and prepped, the turf mowed, dead and aging plant material removed, existing trees and shrubs pruned and more than 125 perennials and shrubs installed, along with bed edging and mulch.



**STATE
OF THE
INDUSTRY**



WON'T BACK

Looking back and looking forward, pros agree that now is the time to show customers there is nothing to fear

BY SETH JONES, CHRISTINA HERRICK AND SARAH WEBB



Goodbye 2021, hello 2022 and hello ... 2032?

For our State of the Industry report, we surveyed readers on the year that was and we asked them about how they felt about the upcoming year. But as a first, we also asked them to think about what the industry might look like 10 years from now.

It turns out lawn care and landscape professionals are just as focused on the business of tomorrow as they are the business of today. Along with the results of our Industry Pulse survey, we present our exclusive three-part story on how readers saw 2021, see 2022 and predict what's in store for 2032.

Part I:

2021 full of ups and downs

Throughout 2021, the same story played out for many landscape professionals around the country: The work is there, but the workers are not.

For example, the labor force at Professional Approach Landscape Service in Middletown, Pa., dwindled by about 30 percent, the equivalent of 10 to 15 workers, according to William Pfundheller, president of the company.

Pfundheller adds that throughout the year, Professional Approach Landscape Service turned down close to \$250,000 of work. The company provides residential and commercial maintenance, turf care, design/build and snow/ice removal.

"We lacked the confidence that we would be able to get it done," Pfundheller says. "It also starts to affect morale because those who are showing up to work every day and doing their job are working hard and they see a lot

Continued on page 14

PHOTO: MARSHALL EVAN PHOTOGRAPHY

Continued from page 13

of turnover or an influx of employees.”

Nathan Sonafrank, general manager of Lakeway Landscaping in Clemmons, N.C., echoes Pfundheller’s sentiment.

“2021, it was an interesting year for sure, because last year with the COVID impact, most industries took a hit, but ours boomed and our business grew with it,” Sonafrank says. “And so, 2021, it was a little more the same, but we faced a little bit bigger challenge with labor. It was hard to get consistent, solid help. However, as far as positives, it’s been great. We’re expanding our business into different areas of the green industry.”

Max Darrington, an arboretist at Brigham Young University in Provo, Utah, points to a lack of interest among college students in green industry fields as a contributing factor in today’s labor crisis.

“It’s not just in the field, but sometimes there’s not a lot of people out there who want to do actual physical labor,” Darrington says. “We have a landscape management degree on campus and we do have students that go through that program, but we don’t have a lot of students coming in because most kids are looking more toward IT stuff, something to do computer-wise.”

Down the road, Pfundheller hopes that new technology such as robotics will help provide some relief for the lack of labor.

“We continue to search for ways to make our landscape maintenance less labor-intensive,” Pfundheller says. “And we’re excited for the introduction of commercial-grade robotic mowers that we read about all the time. Those are things that are kind of stimulating hope for us.”

Like Pfundheller, Sonafrank says his company is looking to new technology to help shoulder some of the labor burden.

“I think the additions of the new technology that these companies are coming out with, such as the battery-powered and automatic equipment and software, it’s only going to boost what we’re able to do. We’ll be able to get more done quicker and require less labor at each specific job,” Sonafrank says. “That way, we can schedule more, make it more compact and generate

more revenue.” For other landscape companies struggling with labor, Sonafrank suggests not lowering their standards when it comes to what’s expected of employees.

“At some point, it sucks, but you’ve got to just grind and get through it and get through the labor shortage because it will come back around,” he says. “We’ve already started to see the turnaround as we have a very consistent group of labor, and it’s paying off for us that we didn’t sacrifice the quality of our workers.”

To get that consistent group of solid workers, Lakeway Landscaping adjusted starting pay to compete with other local companies, offered signing bonuses for new employees and referral bonuses to current crew members who bring new recruits in who stay.

The company also pushed its recruitment efforts through social media, Indeed and Facebook — along with the old-fashioned way: word of mouth.

“If I could have anticipated the labor shortage, I would’ve told myself to make sure we take care of our guys we’ve got,” Sonafrank says. “That way, you can build a very solid crew and your management system just throughout the whole company and you’re not suffering from continual turnover. Doing that would’ve also resulted in a more fluid transition to our expansion and it would have quickened our growth.”

He adds that he would have also adjusted scheduling to accommodate for the lack of labor and situational rain to allow more time to complete jobs.

Overall, he’s hopeful for what’s to come in the coming years.

“As an industry, we’ve been growing and this past year, it boomed. I don’t see any reason why it’s not going to boom anymore,” Sonafrank says, adding that he thinks the industry as a whole will start to raise prices for the services it charges. “The light bulb’s starting to come on that a lot of companies are starting to charge more. People are realizing that charging less not only hurts themselves, but it also hurts the industry, because they’re not realizing how much their time is worth.”



“Demand for services is strong in 2022, which should give companies pricing power to offset wage increases. The question is whether companies will use that power.”

— GREG HERRING, CEO OF THE HERRING GROUP, AN OPERATIONAL AND STRATEGIC FINANCE CONSULTANCY, AND LM COLUMNIST

Part II:

More of the same for 2022

When it comes to what's in store for 2022, experts say the story will be much of the same — a strong demand for services, a tight labor pool and supply-side pressure.

Miles Graves, regional manager for The Greenery, says the company has just completed its first round of 2022



Miles Graves

budgets and forecasts. His region experienced a 15 to 20 percent increase in enhancement revenue in 2021 and he expects that to continue next year.

The Greenery provides mowing and landscape maintenance, design/build and landscape installation and turf and ornamental care for its 90 percent commercial, 10 percent residential clientele.

"2022 is a booked solid," he says. "Most people I've talked to, in the industry from a construction department say the same thing: 'We've already got signed contracts for our entire budget dollars for next year.' Now we're deciding, can we ramp up to take on more work? The same is

true for us and our construction division. We've already got some contracts for 2022 — 20 to 30 percent more than we performed this year."

With this increased demand, Sam Gembel, owner of Atlas Outdoor in Flint, Mich., whose business consists of lawn maintenance, design/build services and snow removal for residential and commercial clients, says now is the time to raise prices for services. Supply issues are a major news story and it's on the tip of customers' tongues.

"If you wait a year out of fear, what's going to happen is customers are going to say, 'Well, you got it this long,'" he says. "They're forgetting how everything's going up. \$4 a gallon for gas is just going to be normal, it's not going back down."

Labor, Gembel says, will continue to be a crunch on the bottom line for the foreseeable future.

"Labor will never be less than \$15 an hour," he says. "Our labor, fuel and insurance in the last two years went up 31 percent. We can't go raise our prices 31 percent. But can we raise it 20 percent? Yes, we can."

Continued on page 16



Sam Gembel

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“With the current focus on inflation, everybody knows that everything’s going up. And it’s important for our industry to take advantage of that public awareness to make sure that we’re not the last guys standing when it comes to getting our share of the profits that we need just to stay in business.”

— **KEN THOMAS**,
PRINCIPAL WITH
ENVIRO CONSULTING
AND LM COLUMNIST

Continued from page 15

Gembel says that while some customers were hesitant to accept the increase, he took the time to explain the reasoning behind the increase — commodity price increases, labor increases and the need to bring on new technology. While Atlas Outdoor lost a few accounts, the disruption was minor.

“You’re better off charging more, losing some customers if people don’t feel the value is there,” he says. “If you lose customers, you’re better off because you can build back with better customers.”

Ken Thomas, principal with Enviro Consulting and a columnist for *LM*, expects the flurry of acquisitions in 2021 to continue next year.

“We’ll continue to see regional and national companies acquiring local leaders,” he says. “Which is good for the industry. It opens doors for smaller companies to step into those shoes and take a new role in leading those markets.”

Thomas doesn’t see an end to the availability issues that have plagued the industry for most of 2021 and this will be something businesses need to anticipate and plan for.

“We’re looking at backlogs and everything from trucks to mowers to even apparel these days,” he says. “We’re going to have to make do with some of the equipment we have for a little bit longer while we wait on that supply chain to loosen up a little bit.”

A bright side to 2022, Thomas says, is how positive a future the industry has for young people. Wages are at an all-time high, and the industry can be an attractive career for the next generation.

“That’s encouraging for young people who are looking for a career that’s not only rewarding but can provide the kind of financial security and growth that most young people are looking for today,” he says.

For Michael Mayberry, chief technology officer for Level Green Landscaping in Upper Marlboro, Md., 2022 will bring a focus on technology. Level Green plans to continue to test autonomous mowers and work with more companies to see how the

technology best fits into the day-to-day operations.

“Next year is really a pivotal point where the ideas are coming out of production and into the real world,” he says. “So we’re going to try the mowers and a wide variety of different environments and really find out what works and what doesn’t. We’re certainly going to put them in fields to understand how fast are they compared to how fast our humans are mowing? How much time does it actually save us?”



Michael Mayberry

Another part of his approach next year is to continue to educate Level Green’s clients and employees on how the company plans to integrate this technology. He’s emphasizing how the company will use the technology not to displace workers but to make crews run more efficiently. Mayberry says he plans to continue his proactive approach with clients, too.

“I’ve been doing a lot of lunch and learns this year with clients and potential clients to just talk about what the technology is and what it can do. Why it’s beneficial to you as a property manager, what the long-term benefits are going to be to your property and what the long-term impacts may be on contract pricing,” he says.

Part III:

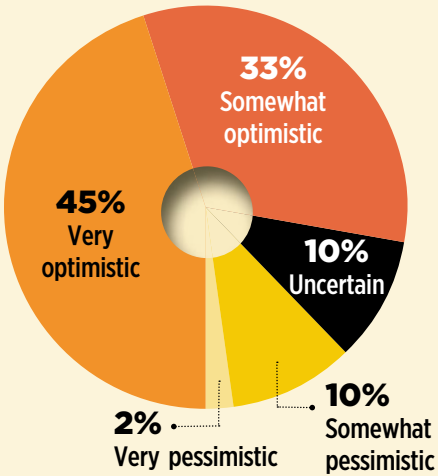
The year 2032

After considering the year that was and then discussing expectations for 2022, it was time to look even further in the future. It might sound distant, but 2032 is only 10 years away. Readers didn’t hesitate to visualize what the industry might look like a decade from now.

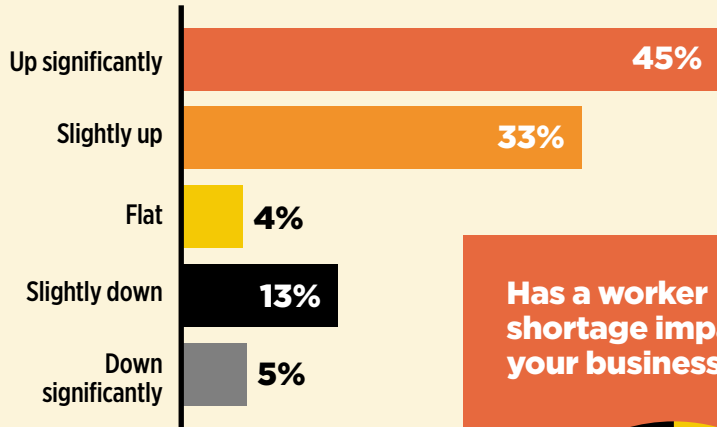
Levi Duckett, president of Sunshine Landscape in Boise, Idaho, says he is always thinking about what the industry and his company might look like in the

Continued on page 18

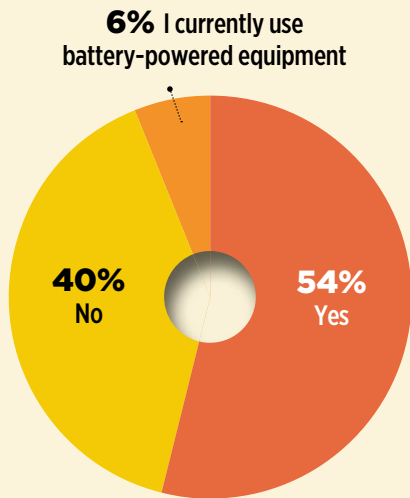
What's your 2022 business outlook?



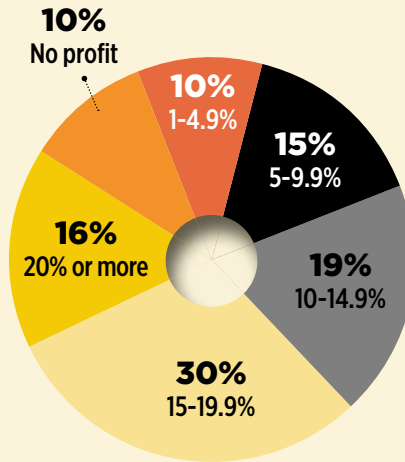
Describe the current state of the landscape and lawn care service market in your region.



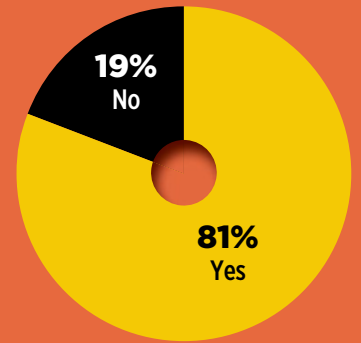
Would you consider using battery-powered equipment?



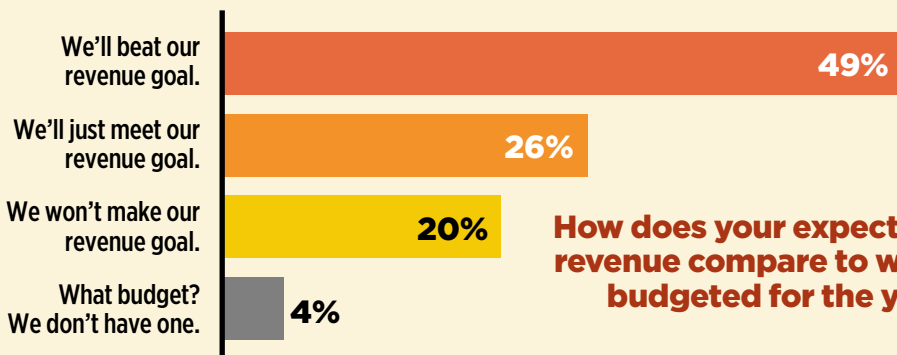
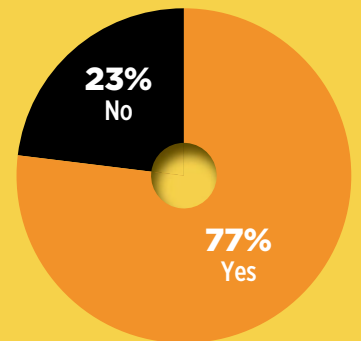
What do you anticipate your 2021 net profit to be?



Has a worker shortage impacted your business?



Has your business been impacted by supply chain issues?



How does your expected 2021 revenue compare to what you budgeted for the year?

Continued from page 16

next five to 10 years. He has a road map he'd like to follow but says the only thing that is a constant is change.

"Everything changes so often, it's hard to know (what's next). Technology is going to be a big focus for us on what we're doing," Duckett says.



Levi Duckett

"We work with Boise State (University). They want us to mow on the weekends because they don't want the noise. We're looking at robotic machines, we're looking at adding battery-powered equipment so we can be there during the day and not bothering the teachers and students.

We're looking at options for that, I think it's smart. The biggest challenge we have is how do we recharge all that stuff out in the field?"

Kyle Narsavage, owner of Greensweep in Burtonsville, Md., says he saw what the future holds when he attended the 2021 GIE+EXPO in October. A common theme among manufacturers was electric and robotic equipment.

"Labor is so tight right now, I don't see that situation getting too much better. We've all got to find ways

SHIFT IN MINDSET

Experts say autonomous mowers are here to stay and the companies hesitant to adopt technology will be left behind.



to be more efficient, and if that's leveraging technology, leveraging electric ... that's a benefit for the earth, (but) it might not save on efficiency," he says. "In D.C., where we are, they've outlawed gas blowers. We're following California. We know that everything is coming after that. String trimmers, hedge trimmers — they're coming next — so we're shifting to electric. It might be a little early for some items, but I think that is here to stay, and I also think robotics is here to stay."



Kyle Narsavage

Riley Rivers, president of Rivers Landscaping in Bozeman, Mont., says he believes the mindset of the industry has shifted, and that "everyone" thinks mowing will be fully automated by 2032. And those who don't believe it might just be fearful of the change.

"It's like how Uber and Airbnb came to the market. The people who are afraid of it will write it off," he says. "But it's only a matter of time until they figure out robotic mowing, so if you're going to do it you just have to capitalize on it."

Mayberry predicts that not only will robotic mowers be the norm, but that they'll also be able to help troubleshoot problem areas of turf. Perhaps a sprayer attachment could be added to the mower to fertilize. Once artificial intelligence gets caught up, the robot could

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“Landscaping companies must own their messaging in 2022 to successfully manage growth.



Customers are aware of the tight labor market and growing demand for landscaping services. Soon they will discover we are experiencing the highest inflation rate in over 30 years (6.2 percent). ... It seems that 2022 could bring a perfect storm that will either reward or punish landscaping companies, depending on their preparedness for it.”


— **JEFF KORHAN**, A DUCT TAPE MARKETING CERTIFIED CONSULTANT AND *LM* COLUMNIST

even calculate the cost of fixing problems in the field and generate a proposal for the client.

Mowing is just the starting point for how robotics will help lawn care professionals, he says. And like Rivers says, those who are afraid of the technology should beware.

“You don’t have to be ready to jump on these things. But if you want to be successful, you need to be watching them so that when it is the right time, you’re not the last one getting involved,” Mayberry says. “And if you are somebody who is saying ‘this is a waste,’ we and other companies like us will gobble you up. Because this is the way of the future. This is a disruption to the industry that is going to go forward. There’s no question about that at this point.”

Jim Cali, co-founder of executive coaching firm McFarlin Stanford, says he’s been pondering the future of the industry for some time. He says he thinks the industry is behind others when it comes to automation, and that it will quickly catch up. He also adds that he thinks the industry will be markedly different in 10 years.

“I think it will be a much more professional industry because that is already what we are seeing as we’re sitting around the dinner table; it’s what we saw a few weeks ago at Landscapes,” Cali says. “People look at this a profession now, not just as an afterthought. I’m excited to see where that goes in 10 years.” 

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DID YOU KNOW

Know your dallisgrass? Try our quiz

Test your knowledge of the cultural practices, control methods and identification of this pesky weed.

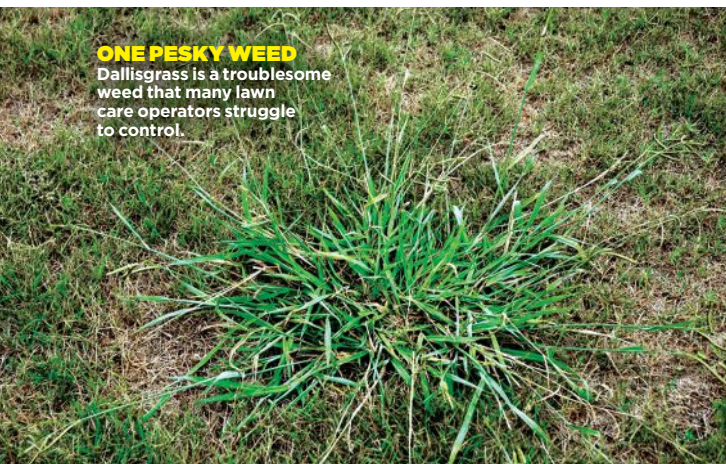
BY SARAH WEBB | LM MANAGING EDITOR

Landscape Management has covered dallisgrass several times this year, so we hope readers get a perfect score on our pop quiz. Take the quiz below and visit [LandscapeManagement.net/dallisgrass-quiz](https://www.landscapemanagement.net/dallisgrass-quiz) to see how your answers stack up.

1. **Dallisgrass is identified by _____.**
(You may choose more than one.)
 - a. A narrow leaf blade
 - b. A wide leaf blade
 - c. Tall membranous ligule with long hairs around the collar
 - d. A leaf that tapers to a point
 - e. A uniform leaf width
 - f. Anyone at a Grateful Dead concert.

ONE PESKY WEED

Dallisgrass is a troublesome weed that many lawn care operators struggle to control.



UNSIGHTLY WEED

Dallisgrass is a weed that makes homeowners cringe.



2. **True or false: Dallisgrass is one of the most troublesome weeds in southern regions, including the Transition Zone.**
 - a. True
 - b. False
3. **Dallisgrass prefers areas with _____.**
 - a. High moisture
 - b. Medium moisture
 - c. Low moisture
4. **True or false: Dallisgrass has tall seed heads in the fall.**
 - a. True
 - b. False
5. **Which of the following cultural practices can lawn care operators employ to combat dallisgrass? (You may choose more than one.)**
 - a. Interseeding cool-season lawns
 - b. Heavy watering
 - c. Increasing mowing height
6. **Experts recommend to stick with one chemical control per season for the best management of dallisgrass.**
 - a. True
 - b. False
7. **True or false: Use only one active ingredient for increased control and reduced turfgrass injury potential.**
 - a. True
 - b. False
8. **What other turfgrass weed is dallisgrass often confused with?**
 - a. *Poa annua*
 - b. Crabgrass
 - c. Nutsedge
 - d. White clover
 - e. None of these. Dallisgrass is easy to identify.

SOURCES: Eric Reasor, Ph.D., Southeast research scientist, PBI-Gordon Corp.; Aaron Hathaway, technical services manager, Nufarm Americas; Lane Tredway, technical services manager, Syngenta



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The 411 on controlled-release fertilizers

Learn the benefits controlled-release fertilizers offer both the turf and operator **BY LAUREN DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR**



Controlled-release fertilizers help improve turf health and reduce nutrient loss.

To reduce the loss of nutrients to the environment and improve turf health, many lawn care operators (LCOs) turn to enhanced-efficiency products like controlled-release fertilizers.

REDUCE TURF STRESS

Controlled-release fertilizers provide a steadier feeding and also limit leaching in areas with heavy rainfall, says Jim Beveridge, owner of Yards Done Right in Westlake, Ohio. He tends to use them going into times of higher temperatures.

“We want a more gradual or slower feeding as the heat ramps up to avoid burning or stressing the lawns out,” Beveridge says. “We generally don’t use them on our first and last applications because of the cool spring and fall temperatures here — and the added cost.”

His company provides lawn fertilization, weed control, tree and shrub insect/disease control, tree and shrub fertilization and organic topdressing services. With an annual revenue of

\$275,000, his customers are about 95 percent residential and 5 percent other.

He says these fertilizers also offer greater flexibility with the application windows, as well as the ability to compensate for rainy periods or prolonged droughts.

“We can literally tweak our mix from day to day,” Beveridge says. “Controlled-release fertilizers are also very beneficial to the environment with less leaching and volatility.”

Experts say it’s best to spread out applications and monitor weather patterns to adjust applications to avoid rainstorms.

“I know companies that will apply one or two applications of extended-release nitrogen fertilizers annually. This works for some business models, but our model is one of being on the properties more often to deal with any other issues that may arise,” Beveridge says. “So, it’s nice to have an array of different products in our toolbox. Obviously, if you need something for a quicker green-up, you wouldn’t reach for a controlled-release product.”

annual revenue is \$200 million. Operators get more for their money because they aren’t losing product that’s wasted with leaching, DeBels says.

“The product only releases the appropriate amount of fertilizer that the plant can absorb, so you aren’t wasting product or money,” he says.

ADDED BENEFITS

In addition to achieving healthier, better-looking lawns, controlled-release products can help owners combat labor shortage issues because they don’t need to be applied as often. DeBels says his technicians will rarely be on a site every week or two, so using the controlled-release fertilizers help ensure the nutrients are being used appropriately without additional visits.

“The product can last anywhere from one to two months to three or four months. Some quick-release items last a few weeks,” he says. “For us, it’s about time management. The product is more expensive, but it feeds the lawn for a longer amount of time, and putting it down doesn’t take any more time or labor than the quick-release.”

Before making a purchase, DeBels says he looks at the quality of the fertilizer — including the nitrogen content — to ensure it’s up to Weed Man’s standard and will work for his clients’ needs.

“We buy into controlled-release fertilizers because they’re better for the environment and client,” DeBels says. “It’s one of our primary value-added opportunities. We let people know we’re going to do what’s best for the environment and their pocketbooks.”

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.



Controlled-release products are beneficial during high temperatures as they avoid burning turf out.

AVOID WASTE

While controlled-release fertilizers are more expensive than traditional fertilizers, operators should be asking themselves when — not if — they should add controlled-release fertilizers to their lineup, says Brad DeBels, vice president of operations at Weed Man in Madison, Wis.

Weed Man Madison offers lawn care, pest control and mosquito control services. Its customers are about 95 percent residential, and the company’s

BIG LOSS
When flooding hit Dan Lyster's business, more than 250 bags of turf seed were ruined.



How to conduct an insurance checkup

Insurance coverage is an important part of your business, and experts share why yearly evaluations help protect your most critical assets **BY LM STAFF**

Dan Lyster will probably never forget the moment he realized his insurance coverage was lacking — when the remnants of Hurricane Ida flooded his Downingtown, Pa., business. Ida dumped more than 10 inches of rainfall on Downingtown within hours in early September.

Lyster said he moved some turf seed from an early purchase program and other items in his shop up on higher shelves to prevent losses, but it didn't work. Floodwaters ruined his inventory of more than 250 bags of seed.

His business, DTL Total Turf Care, had about \$8,900 in coverage for miscellaneous office items, including inventory. Lyster estimates it would cost him more than \$50,000 to replace the lost turf seed and equipment damaged from flooding.

"I had an assumption that I had insurance, that I was covered," he says. "I'm the kind of business owner who's just go-go-go. So, when the insurance renewal papers came in, I just threw them on my desk and didn't think about them."

Losing an entire inventory of products is a tough lesson to learn, but he says he's covered for incidentals now. He encourages contractors to take the time now to look at insurance policies to ensure proper coverage.

To help prevent you from making a similar mistake, Will Allen, founder of Green Industry Captive, a captive insurance provider and a principal at Allen Insurance Group, and brothers Drew Garcia, vice president for Rancho Mesa's landscape group, and Greg

Garcia, account executive for Rancho Mesa's landscape group, share ways contractors can ensure proper insurance coverage.

Work with a knowledgeable insurance agent. It's critical for those in the green industry to work with an insurance agent with experience in the lawn care or landscape industry. Greg Garcia says there are a lot of nuances and an agent with knowledge of the green industry will help ensure you're covered.

Know the make-or-break parts of your policy. Allen says you should know and identify some key parts of coverage to check on.

"That's things as simple as making sure the name of your business is right, as well as any other entities that you're operating under," he says. "That's really where you can tell how detail-oriented an agency is."

Perform policy checkups yearly at least. Drew and Greg Garcia say it's good to evaluate your policy with your agent 90 or 120 days before renewal. Especially if you've added or removed services. Your agent can help you determine whether to stick with the policy you have or shop for a new one for your business.

"You hear a lot of landscape professionals who are frustrated with last-minute insurance renewals and decisions," Drew Garcia says. "Having a 'pre-renewal' meeting 90 to 120 days in advance of your policy effective date can just about eliminate this pain."

The Garcias say you should think of your policy as fluid and update your



agent with any changes to your business such as adding or selling equipment, buildings or changes in services offered.

Know your appetite for risk. Drew and Greg Garcia say there's no one-size-fits-all policy for the green industry. Finding the ideal coverage for your business is about the amount of risk you as an owner are willing to take.

"Maybe they've gone 10 or 12 years with minimal loss history which proves strong risk control and now opens up the possibility to explore some performance-based insurance products," Drew Garcia says.

Look at alternatives. Allen says captive insurance may be an economic and practical insurance coverage option. A group of companies comes together to form its own insurance company in group captive insurance. The group takes on the risk that the insurance company typically shoulders. While this has typically been available to larger companies, there are options for landscape and snow removal businesses that lowers the premium threshold to \$75,000.

"From a 30,000-foot view, what a captive insurance program does is it allows businesses that are not having many losses to get a large portion of their premiums back each year," he says. "With our Green Industry Captive program, it ends up cutting your annual net insurance cost by around 30 to 40 percent."

THE BIG ONE

Natural views

BY SARAH WEBB
LM MANAGING EDITOR

LOCATION Vancouver, Wash.

COMPANY Pacific
Landscape Management

DETAILS For this project, Tidewater Cove Condominiums, a homeowner association, wanted to keep views of the nearby Columbia River unobstructed and the rest of the community pristine for the hundreds of residents who call Tidewater home.

Located on the Washington side of the Columbia River, the property provides panoramic views of the Columbia River and the Cascade Mountain Range, including Mount Hood. In addition to panoramic views, the property has two lakes nestled between the buildings.

Pacific Landscape Management has maintained the site since early 2018 and uses Toro mowers and Stihl handheld equipment to keep it in tiptop shape. Typically, two to four crew members work at the site about three days each week.

Crews focus on the mowing and edging on some days and then zero in on detail work and projects the remaining days of the week.

Detail work includes addressing residents' requests to trim shrubs, pruning in the atriums of the buildings and adding seasonal color.

"This site is a premier site in our area, and it's a blend of the homeowner and commercial styles. The expectations and the level of involvement are very high, but it's also my favorite account," says Mina Szody, area manager at Pacific Land-



scape Management. "It's a beautiful site in which I can blend all the best parts about my job in one site. Everyone is always complimenting my crew members, who take pride in maintaining the area."

Challenges in landscape maintenance include drainage issues and wildlife control.

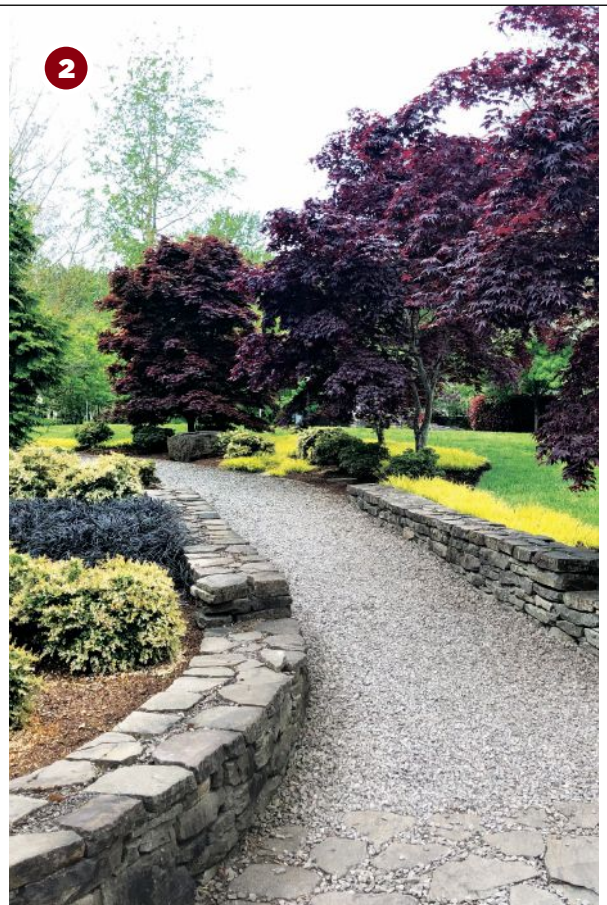
To keep geese and beavers at bay, Pacific Landscape Management implemented natural wildlife abatement techniques like introducing swans, which are territorial

and scare off other birds such as Canada geese and other nuisance animals. Additionally, French drain areas were installed in the turf areas that were struggling with standing water.

Pacific Landscape Management won a Silver Award in the 2020 National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence program for this project. 

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





Captions | **1.** Located on the Washington side of the Columbia River, the property provides panoramic views of the Columbia River as well as the Cascade Mountain Range including Mount Hood. Along with the panoramic views, the property has two lakes nestled between the buildings that are maintained to the highest environmental level. **2.** One of the many tree-lined walking trails that are maintained to connect the buildings on the property. **3.** A detail of the drainage islands. **4.** A nested swan keeps guard of the two ponds that it claims as its home. The introduction of the swan is an innovative way to keep out geese that cause damage and expense to landscape maintenance. The swan is a territorial bird that brings elegance to the ponds while pushing out invasive bird species. The ponds are kept clean and healthy for aquatic plants and wildlife by maintaining subsurface aeration and balancing biological nutrients as well as spot weed treatment of invasive weeds. **5.** Open lawn vistas require clean mowing and crisp edges that enhance the natural views. Private pedestrian circulation traverses the property, connecting the buildings while capturing views. Pathways are maintained to the highest standard to ensure invasive weeds and naturalized vegetation do not encroach into the many gravel pathways. **6.** Long vistas of expansive, professionally maintained lawns are balanced by the open views of the river and surrounding mountains. Deliberate plant rejuvenation and arbor care maintenance complement the high level of knowledge and skill to maintain the aquatic assets that integrate into the natural landscape.

PHOTOS: BOB GROVER

BUSINESS BOOSTERS

Opportunity abounds in arboriculture

Women share lessons they've learned in tree care and why the industry needs more female representation **BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR**

While the number of women in arboriculture — the cultivation, study and management of trees and shrubs — is low, women say there's plenty of opportunity for females in tree care.

Sisters Melissa LeVangie Ingersoll and Bear LeVangie, co-founders of the Women's Tree Climbing Workshop, studied forestry in college and became arborists. The sisters found the industry was a great combination of their education, athleticism and passion for nature and the outdoors.

"It's always pushing me physically and mentally," Melissa LeVangie Ingersoll says. "I feel blessed every day to have this career be the one I chose to do for life."

Natalie McNeill, a district manager in the Davey Tree Expert Co.'s Fort Collins, Colo., branch says she feels fortunate that as her career progressed from intern to plant health care technician to district manager, she didn't face too many struggles.

"They can gain respect for you if you're knowledgeable about what you're talking about," she says when facing adversity as a woman. "Stand up tall and let them know that you know what you're talking about."

SUPPORT IS CRITICAL

Bear LeVangie says as she and her sister lead tree climbing workshops, they com-

monly meet frustrated women. They're often stuck with a bad manager or in a role they weren't hired for and they have to fight to perform the job they were hired to do.

"Typically, they get fed up, and they leave," she says.

Megan Kacenski, an arborist representative in Bartlett Tree Experts' Bala Cynwyd, Pa., office says a strong, supportive network of mentors — of both

men and women — has helped her in her career in arboriculture.

She encourages women entering and in the tree care industry to find a team.

"Find different people, people that are great managers, great climbers — all different aspects of the work that we do," she says. "Once you have a support system that is go-

ing to push you in the long term, you're going to be able to do some really great things in your career."

Allie Buchanan, a district manager for Davey Tree Expert Co. of Canada's Windsor, Ontario, office, says a supportive manager helped her as she entered the industry five years ago. A former boss spent a few hours with her, showing her the ropes — literally — with her crewmate. After teaching her about tie points and how to execute the knots, they sent her up in a safe tree to practice climbing.

"They were just giving me tips when I was up there," she says. "I had the biggest smile on my face. It's the best



part is just having a one-on-one interaction with someone and having someone teach you what they know."

Bear LeVangie says there's also endless resources for women to tap into, whether that's the Women in the Arboriculture network, a local chapter of the Tree Care Industry Association, state or local arborist associations, Extension offices and more. It's about identifying those resources in your area.

Kacenski agrees, noting, "If you need someone locally, it's just a really supportive community. They can just kind of help you do whatever you need to do."

INDUSTRY ADVICE

As for advice in the industry, Bear LeVangie says it's important for women to persevere and not take no for an answer.

"Whatever your focus is — the way you can best do the job, gain education — whatever your path might be, keep asking until you get the 'yes' you need to help you meet your goals," she says.

Kacenski says she struggled with understanding her physical limitations on the job but also recognizing the strengths she brought to an arborist team.

"As a really young arborist, I wanted to be able to throw the 300-pound log on my shoulder and carry it 100 yards to the chipper," she says. "My crew leader taught



Megan Kacenski

ENDLESS OPPORTUNITIES
Melissa LeVangie Ingersoll says the industry needs to continue to showcase the possibilities in arboriculture.



WEALTH OF INFORMATION
 Bear LeVangie (pictured) says there's a vast network of resources through national, state and local organizations for women looking to pursue or further a career in tree care.

me to learn my strengths and the way that we work together. Not everyone's going to be the strongest, biggest person on the job and finding ways to navigate that is really important for individual skills development, as well as in learning how to be a productive member of the team."

McNeill says it's important for women to understand that it's not uncommon for all arborists to struggle with the fit of personal protective equipment (PPE), including climbing harnesses and helmets, so don't be afraid to speak up. This isn't a gender issue, she says. It's a safety

less likely to ask because you don't want to be seen as a complainer," she says. "You should speak up for yourself. If you're (a male who is) managing or leading a female climber or a female in the industry, you have to be open to that as well."

THERE'S A FUTURE

Melissa LeVangie Ingersoll stresses the importance of the industry to continue to raise the profile careers for both women and men. And she sees both a bright future and a strong need for more arborists.

"I believe a lot of younger people don't

even know that our career exists," she says. "Because their everyday existence does not overlap with an arborist, it does not overlap with a company that cares for trees."

McNeill says it's important for women to know there's a place for them in arboriculture.

"You bring an important value to the job," she says. "There's not many of us. So, the more we can bring into the industry, the better the industry will be. You have to find the people that support you, persevere and you'll go big places in the industry." @



Natalie McNeill

PHOTO: WOMEN'S TREE CLIMBING WORKSHOP



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MAINTAIN YOUR EDGE

Why you need to expand benefits to keep and entice talent

It's no secret the green industry is experiencing a labor shortage. Experts share how a benefits package could put your business ahead of other employers. **BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR**

A major story for the green industry in 2021 has been how tight the labor crunch has been. While many landscaping operations may raise wages to entice new employees, experts emphasize that business owners can use benefits as a way to offer a more comprehensive package.

Brian McCabe is one of them. He is a financial adviser with Savage and Associates and co-owner of McCabe Outdoor Power, an equipment dealer in Grand Rapids, Ohio.



Brian McCabe

The first step to expanding benefits is to work with a financial advisor or professional to help evaluate your options and your accountant to work through any tax implications. McCabe recommends a small landscape business consider something as easy as a simple IRA which has a minimal startup for the participant — under \$20. An employee can contribute up to \$13,500 currently a year. An employer would typically match the first 3 percent of employee's contributions. For example, an employee making \$40,000 a year would only cost a company \$1,200 a year if the employee opted to contribute at least 3 percent to the plan.

"That contribution is a tax write-off for the business as well," he says. "It's a way to tell your employees that you care about them and that you're trying to do something for them."

McCabe recommends employers work with a financial adviser to allocate a set amount of money monthly for employees to contribute to several different offerings: health insurance, a retirement plan and/or life insurance. This allows a company to provide a more customized approach to a benefits package.

"It's something these small companies can start to offer and think about rounding out their benefits portfolio," he says.

GAUGE EMPLOYEE INTEREST

Sam Gembel, owner of Atlas Outdoor in Flint, Mich., says his company constantly looks at different benefits for his employees — whether that's purchasing new equipment to save wear and tear on his crew members' bodies or adding additional offerings to the employment package.

Gembel says he learned the hard way that he needed employee input before adding any additional offerings. Atlas Outdoor provides lawn maintenance and design/build services to half residential and half commercial clients and does commercial snow removal.

"In my mind, it was, 'Oh, well, everybody wants retirement,'" he says. "We started dealing with the benefits guy and getting ideas on what it was going to cost and what the company portion was going to be."

As Atlas Outdoor readied the launch of its retirement package, Gembel says he


wanted to gauge interest. The company conducted an internal survey to see what benefits employees would like to see.

"Hardly anybody mentioned a retirement in there," he says. "There were more people asking about health benefits."

As Gembel looked at competitors in the landscape industry, many offered retirement packages. Health benefits, though, would be a strong recruitment and retention tool. So Gembel pivoted and added health insurance first.

Atlas Outdoor pays the employer portion year-round for health benefits, especially for a handful of summer employees who only run snow plows in the winter. Gembel says during the initial rollout, more than half his company signed up. He also says his employees prefer Atlas Outdoor's health insurance over a free plan available through the county. Employees are eligible at the 60-day mark, and Gembel says many employees start asking about eligibility sooner.

"A lot of people at 50 days are going 'when can I sign up and get on the benefits plan?'" he says. "We worked really hard to find a good package that had a good offer for the team. When you look at it, yes, it's an investment.

But it's cheaper than Indeed, it's cheaper than training, it's cheaper than ZipRecruiter," he says. "Our company was in business for 10 years before we rolled out health benefits. But I feel like it was exactly the right time to do it." 



Sam Gembel

HOW TO

SOLVING PROBS
Landscapers can identify their big issues and choose a software accordingly.



Make the most of 2022 with software

Industry experts share tips on how contractors can get the most out of their business software in 2022 **BY EMILY SCHAPPACHER | CONTRIBUTOR**

Business management software can take a company's organization and productivity to the next level, but there are a number of factors to consider when choosing a program.

"When choosing business software, landscape contractors should find a solution that enables them to grow their business, service their customers, and maximize their money all on one platform," says Tim Robinson, COO of WorkWave, a cloud-based field service and fleet management software company based in Holmdel, N.J. "Choosing one integrated platform streamlines business processes throughout all aspects of the business life cycle, saves time and money and creates an exceptional customer experience."

Industry experts share tips on how contractors can choose the right program and get the most out of their business software in 2022.

PROBLEM ID

Technology is designed to solve problems, but contractors first need to identify exactly what their problems are and then choose the best software system to meet those needs, says Donna Garner, chief marketing officer for Arborgold, a field management software system for the green industry based in Bloomington, Ind.

"Every software vendor tends to do certain things well. For example, one program may be great for scheduling, but their marketing features are lacking," Garner says. "Contractors need to identify

what their biggest problems are and find a program that solves as many of those problems as possible in one system."

PICK A PARTNER

Robinson reminds contractors to purchase software from a reputable company that can offer training and support and help them grow in the long term.

"It is important to do your research and make sure that the company you are doing business with can scale to your business needs and has longevity and immense knowledge in the industry," he says. "While some of this may not seem as important as the software itself, you are trusting this company with the entirety of your business operations and want to make sure they are continually innovating, investing in their resources and solutions and have a strong vision for the future."

LEAD THE WAY

Bryan Mours, vice president of customer services for Aspire Software, a landscape business management software provider based in Chesterfield, Mo., says implementing software should be treated like any other company project: Assign a manager, a process and a timeline. He adds that a new software program will require changes to the way things are done within the company, and employees are often resistant to the process. It's important to choose the right person to oversee the implementation, and company leadership should approach the task with energy and positivity.

"You need to be able to accept the fact that some things in your organization

will need to change based on how the software functions," Mours says. "Identify the person within the organization that will be able to best manage this project from start to finish."

BE CONSISTENT

Mours says the most successful companies have consistent processes for operating the software. Everyone within the company should use each part of the program the same way, every day. Document the processes and make them accessible to all employees.

"Software is just another tool, like a shovel or a mower. Without good processes, the tool becomes useless," Mours says. "Rather than have everyone manage the software their own way, write up a process around it and make sure everyone is following the same path."

DIG DEEPER

For contractors to get the most out of their software, Garner says it's a good idea to take the time to explore the program and learn about functions beyond the main features.

"Think about your smartphone — there are so many things your phone can do that many people don't take the time to learn," she says. "The same principle applies to business software. Contractors get comfortable with what they know and fail to learn some of the really cool things these programs can do that can make life easier and save time."

Schappacher is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.

HARDSCAPE SOLUTIONS

On solid ground

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

LOCATION Cockeysville, Md.**COMPANY** Lehnhoff's Landscaping

DETAILS This project evolved from an original landscape lighting repair and pathway to an outdoor wine cellar to a project to make the property's backyard more functional for the family. The existing deck was also failing, says Robert Lehnhoff, owner of Lehnhoff's Landscaping in White Marsh, Md.

"The way the family wanted to use the property presented new challenges to make it more functional," he says.

Access to the backyard was steep and limited. Lehnhoff estimates crews moved about 100 cubic yards of soil to create temporary access roads to get the Bobcat skid-steers and excavators to the project. Lehnhoff's Landscaping added a thumb attachment to its Bobcat E50 to place boulders that weighed between 2,000 and 6,000 pounds on a slope.

"Using the right equipment, creating workable access and trying to be as safe as possible was key in this project," he says.

Lehnhoff's Landscaping selected a dense Brazilian ipe hardwood for the deck. Details include natural stone flatwork with a combination of reclaimed square and rectangular natural blue-stone and flagstone on the lower patio. Scalloped, curved stone walls lead to the client's wine cellar.

Lehnhoff's Landscaping won a Silver Award in the 2021 National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence program. 🏆

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



1



3



6

PHOTOS: LESLIE STEPPE PHOTOGRAPHY



Captions | 1. Landscape lighting highlights the design elements of this project at night. 2. Lehnhoff's Landscaping added a bluestone patio off of the pavilion that serves as a landing. Details include a curved stone wall and planter with bluestone tread steps. 3. A Bobcat E50 with a thumb attachment aided in the placement of boulders to stabilize the yard and add a natural design element. 4. A before photo of the back of the home. 5. An up-close look at the tongue and groove custom Douglas fir ceiling, designed to match the new outdoor design. 6. The curved stairway and walkway lead to access to the basement wine cellar. 7. Crews leveled this underutilized area and created additional outdoor living space. Details include a custom ipe deck with a horizontal cable railing.

BRAND U

Bringing it to life

One landscape designer shares why PRO Landscape Image and Planner is her design software of choice

BY SARAH WEBB | LM MANAGING EDITOR



Nicole Risch, co-owner, lead designer and business manager of Verdure H2O in Milford, Mich., has been using PRO Landscape software for nearly 17 years.

Verdure H2O specializes in designing and constructing professional landscapes, hardscapes and water features for mainly residential and small commercial clients.

PRO Landscape is a design software platform developed in 1994. It provides landscape designers and landscape professionals tools to create design plans and presentations to increase sales.

The software also features photo imaging to visually represent plants, hardscapes and other landscape elements, such as night and holiday lighting, CAD for scaled precise drawings, professional proposals and 3D rendering of landscape designs. It includes a large landscape image library, including plants by climate zone; hardscapes, including pavers, walls and boulders; landscape statuary; water features; outdoor kitchens, fireplaces and more.

LIKE A PHOTOGRAPH

Risch purchased the programs after seeing a presentation at a trade show. She notes that the company uses both Image and Planner features of the software during on-site and video conferences.

“Clients greatly appreciate seeing a comprehensive visual of the proposed design,” Risch says. “We first present the design using PRO Landscape Image, which offers a detailed visual that is akin to a photograph. The transformation is often dramatic and considerable,



VERDURE H2O, INC.
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and clients really enjoy seeing their home (or business) framed with a new landscape that beautifully enhances their property.”

Risch says she appreciates that she can show alternate landscape selections and hardscape features to clients during video conferences. An Image feature she particularly likes is the ability to customize and import any image she wants, so if there is a specialty item a client prefers or requests, she can include it in the design.

“I have even shown clients how seasonal flower selections, potted arrangements, statuary or a new exterior paint color on their home will look,” Risch says. “I have fun with the program by customizing each client’s design.”


VISUALIZING THE DESIGN

After reviewing the Image design, Verdure H2O then presents and reviews the scaled Pro Landscape Planner CAD

to show the exact landscape or hardscape placement as related to the dimensions of the home or business, walkways, lot and neighboring homes and structures.

“Collectively, reviewing both the Pro Landscape Image concept and Pro Landscape Planner CAD with a client allows them a sense of clarity and comfort, as well as excitement, because both programs help familiarize them with all facets of the proposed design,” Risch says.

Risch says she had no challenges implementing the program into her company, and she notes that the program features lifetime technical assistance with great responsiveness.

Overall, she says she looks forward to program updates that will allow her to show clients more advanced 3D hardscape renderings. 

LIFELIKE DESIGNS

Nicole Risch, co-owner of Verdure H2O says the realistic renderings of PRO Landscape software help sell projects.

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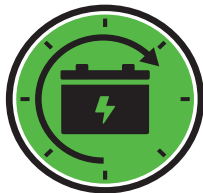
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A LOOK AT CALIFORNIA'S BAN ON GAS-POWERED EQUIPMENT

Air quality regulators in the Golden State effectively set national policy on fuel efficiency for cars and trucks, and now they've come for mowers and blowers

BY LM STAFF

When the largest state in the nation bans the sale of gasoline-powered lawn care and landscaping equipment, landscape company owners should definitely take notice, industry advocates say. What happens in the Golden State often works its way to the rest of the nation.

"This won't stay in California," says Sandra Giarde, executive director of the California Landscape Contractors Association (CLCA). "There's a significant environmental lobby, and they're going to want to replicate this everywhere."

The law, signed into effect in October, directs the California Air

Experts say a ban on gas-powered equipment in California may spread outward to other states.

Resources Board (CARB) to create rules banning the sale of new gasoline-powered lawn tools, including mowers, handheld equipment and any new gas-powered equipment using small off-road engines, by 2024, or whenever feasible. Companies will still be able to use existing nonelectric equipment.

Assembly member Marc Berman, a Democrat representing Silicon

Valley's Menlo Park, argues that the law is necessary to fight global warming and to protect landscape industry employees.

"Leaf blowers, lawn mowers and other equipment with small gas-powered

Continued on page BP4



Sandra Giarde

BATTERY-POWERED EQUIPMENT GUIDE

“I definitely see more and more pros moving into this area not necessarily because they’re forced to but because they’ve run the numbers and they’ve figured out that it is beneficial to their business.”

—ROGER PHELPS,
COMMUNICATIONS MANAGER
FOR STIHL

Continued from page BP3

engines emit staggering levels of air pollution,” Berman says. “These noisy machines are terribly disruptive to communities across California, and the workers who breathe in exhaust from this equipment day in and day out face disproportionate health risks.”

The CLCA and the National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP) argue that the law doesn’t account for landscaping companies, and they argue that battery-powered, commercial-grade equip-

ment won’t be powerful enough or have long enough service life on a charge to be practical for years to come.

INCENTIVE DOLLARS

Berman notes that the legislation includes \$30 million to fund equipment upgrades for small businesses, and CARB has other grant programs that could offset gas-to-electric upgrade costs.

NALP Vice President of Government Relations Andrew Bray and Girarde say it isn’t nearly enough. California has about

OPPORTUNITIES ABOUND

Bray and Girarde are right to have concerns about how this new law will impact the industry, but many OEM manufacturers of battery-powered equipment say they see the adversity in California as an opportunity for the green industry nationwide to respond to the demand set by municipalities, corporations and universities for quieter and low-emissions equipment. Roger Phelps, communications manager for Stihl, says being proactive provides new opportunities for the industry.

“If a landscaper wants to continue to do business, they have to adjust,” he says. “I think a lot of landscapers offer both (gas- and battery-powered equipment), and that’s how they remain really competitive in the market. We’ll offer our gas services, or if you want us to operate before 9 a.m., we’ll have that because of our battery-powered equipment. We’ll carve out a whole segment of our business.”

Keith Coultrap, Husqvarna’s director of professional products, says it’s this bigger focus on sustainability and the environmental impacts of gas-powered equipment that’s pushing these municipalities to reconsider equipment use.

“States, cities and towns around the country are working to reduce their impacts on the environment, including efforts related to lawn care and landscape maintenance,” he says. “California’s new bill regarding gas-powered lawn equipment poses both challenges and opportunities for the industry.”

Phelps also says it’s these opportunities with battery-powered equipment that can turn a

challenge into a benefit for a labor-strapped industry searching for workers to keep up with demand for services.

“One of our fastest-growing customers is the state parks,” he says. “We have a great relationship with America’s state parks. They rely a lot on seasonal labor. You can’t really depend on seasonal labor to start equipment properly or learn how to mix two-cycle fuel. I give them a piece of equipment; I give them a battery. Push the button. How many bars, put the battery in, pull the trigger. You’re done. That’s about as easy as it gets.”

Phelps says this ease of use is what’s enticing many landscape businesses to take a strong look at battery-powered equipment.

“Landscapers are saying ‘Wow! This is easier to use,’” he says. “It has all the market benefits, low emissions, low noise. As we see fuel prices climb up to \$4 a gallon... all of a sudden, that 5 cents an hour for your watt hours starts to look pretty good. I definitely see more and more pros moving into this area not necessarily because they’re forced to but because they’ve run the numbers, and they’ve figured out that it is beneficial to their business.”



12,000 licensed lawn care contractors and as many as three times as many unlicensed ones. Each company has several gas-powered tools, so that \$30 million won't go very far, Giarde says.

"Theoretically, CARB has more money, but there are a lot of hands out already for those funds," Giarde says, referring to grant programs aimed at cutting emissions at ports, for commercial truck fleets or for agricultural businesses. "I don't have any confidence that industry is going to see any more than the \$30 million already allocated."

CARB POWER

California's Air Resources Board is arguably the second most powerful environmental




Andrew Bray

regulator in the country, second only to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). For decades, CARB has set stricter emissions rules for cars and trucks than the EPA, and more than a

dozen states copy those regulations, putting more than half of Americans under CARB rules.

Landscaping industry associations in Northeastern states such as Massachusetts, New Jersey and Pennsylvania say they haven't seen any legislation calling for similar laws outside of California.

Bray says every landscape professional in the country should be paying attention to the issue and politely sharing concerns with elected officials if they see local or state bans moving into their areas. 

BACKGROUND ON CALIFORNIA'S AB 1346

Bans new equipment. The bill, passed this summer and signed into law in October, bans the sale of new equipment that uses gasoline or diesel engines instead of batteries. Landscaping companies can continue to use existing gasoline-powered equipment as long as they can keep it running.

\$30 million fund. The legislation sets aside funds for small businesses to upgrade gas-powered equipment to battery power. The California Landscape Contractors Association says there are 12,000 licensed contractors in the state, providing an average of \$2,500 per company. The National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP) estimates the fund offers \$15 per piece of equipment used today.

CARB's clout. The California Air Resources Board (CARB) was two years into setting rules for lawn care equipment, and final rules had been expected in December. So, the bill that passed the General Assembly and was signed by the governor in October directed the agency to do what it was already doing. More than half of U.S. citizens live in states that follow California's rules on car and truck fuel economy, making the air resources board the second most powerful environmental agency in the country, just behind the EPA. States following CARB's car laws include: Connecticut, Colorado, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, Oregon, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington and Washington, D.C.



Battery-powered equipment may start to replace gas-powered machines (pictured) as bans start to take hold.

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Greenworks Commercial

One of the keys to ensuring an effective operation when landscapers make the switch from gas to battery is battery management throughout the workday. At 2021 GIE+EXPO in Louisville, Greenworks Commercial introduced an innovative new charging solution that makes battery management easier than ever for landscape pros.

Greenworks Commercial's new six-port supercharger offers the utmost in charging convenience. Rapidly charge six batteries simultaneously to keep your team powered throughout the day. An internal cooling system keeps batteries cool and allows for faster charging — 2.5-Ah, 4.0-Ah and 5.0-Ah batteries in 40 minutes, 8.0-Ah batteries in 60 minutes.

In addition, a folding handle with rubber grips and 10-inch never-flat wheels make the unit easy to transport, and a rugged steel base with rubber feet keeps it stable anywhere. Ensuring that you can get your batteries charged on the job site, the six-port supercharger allows users to charge outdoors even in inclement weather with a battery door that protects against the elements.

Greenworks Commercial's innovative six-port supercharger delivers the speed, portability, convenience and durability professional landscapers have been looking for in an on-the-go charging solution. It'll be available in spring 2022 through Greenworks Commercial's network of independent dealers and direct through [GreenworksCommercial.com](https://www.GreenworksCommercial.com) with an MSRP of \$499.99.



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Products that Work

Battery equipment roundup



AIRION BACKPACK BLOWER

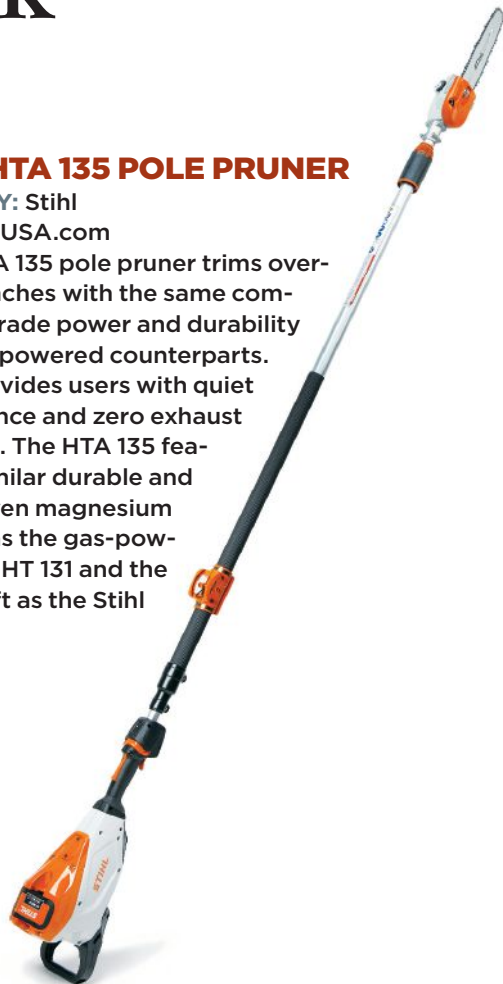
COMPANY: Pellenc
URL: PellencUS.com

Pellenc's new Airion battery-powered backpack blower is designed for professionals. This new blower from Pellenc delivers up to 856 cfm and runtimes of up to 4.5 hours on one charge. The Airion Backpack Blower offers ergonomic features, including comfortable cushions and a three-point adjustable harness. The product is waterproof with IP54 protection rating against dust and water, outputs 96 dBA and has zero emissions.

STIHL HTA 135 POLE PRUNER

COMPANY: Stihl
URL: StihlUSA.com

Stihl's HTA 135 pole pruner trims overhead branches with the same commercial-grade power and durability of its gas-powered counterparts. It also provides users with quiet performance and zero exhaust emissions. The HTA 135 features a similar durable and field-proven magnesium gearbox as the gas-powered Stihl HT 131 and the same shaft as the Stihl HT 135.



EFORCE 56V DLM-2100SP SELF-PROPELLED 3-IN-1 LAWN MOWER

COMPANY: Echo
URL: Echo-USA.com

Echo's new eFORCE 56V DLM-2100SP Self-Propelled 3-in-1 Lawn Mower is one of the 10 units included in Echo's new eFORCE 56V Battery System. The DLM-2100SP delivers perfect cuts for lawns up to 1/3 acre and allows users to choose between mulching, rear bagging or side-discharge mowing. With easy push-button start, the DLM-2100SP provides power and torque to cut through even the toughest grass. Echo's eFORCE 56V Battery System will be available in early 2022 and comes with a two-year commercial warranty.



Continued on page BP10

BATTERY-POWERED EQUIPMENT GUIDE

Battery equipment roundup

Continued from page BP9

EGO POWER+ BACKPACK LINK

COMPANY: Ego

URL: EgoPowerPlus.com

The Ego Power+ Backpack Link system adds more run time and less weight to Ego tools. The Backpack Link is a universal system, allowing users to put the weight of any Ego battery on their back rather than on the tool or in their hand. Workers can carry the biggest battery Ego makes on their backs, so the blower, string trimmer or hedge trimmer stays light in hand. The Link has a well-made harness with a chest and belly strap for all-day comfort.



CZ 60R

COMPANY: Greenworks

URL: GreenworksCommercial.com

Greenworks Commercial's new CZ 60R is a 60-inch commercial ride-on zero-turn mower. The powerful 82-volt mower with a 16-kilowatt battery cuts up to 14 acres on a single charge. An eight-gauge 60-inch fabricated deck, commercial foot pedal deck lift and multipurpose fender and surf plates provide durability, convenience and versatility. The mower is equipped with LED headlights for an earlier start or a later end to work and an electric takeoff power port to connect front hitch power accessories. Included is a five-year or 2,000-hour product and battery warranty.



HUSQVARNA 550IBTX

COMPANY: Husqvarna

URL: Husqvarna.com

The Husqvarna 550iBTX is a powerful and ergonomic battery-powered backpack blower with impressive blowing power of 550 cfm. Designed for commercial use, its low vibration and noise levels — 61 dBA at 50 feet — allow operators to work in public settings and noise-restricted areas. The lithium-ion-powered brushless motor system of the Husqvarna 550iBTX means there are fewer parts to service, less downtime and lower operational costs. The 550iBTX comes with an IPX4 water resistance rating.





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BUSINESS BOOSTERS

Get the green light on landscape lighting

Contractors share what you should do before expanding your landscape lighting offerings **BY LAUREN DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR**



Industry trade shows, publications, conventions and manufacturers are some of the top sources professionals use to stay up to date on the latest landscape lighting product rollouts. But before you incorporate new products into your lineups and designs, four landscape contractors share the steps they take to ensure new products are up to their standards.

NEW BUT TESTED

Remaining cutting edge is a priority for Jerry McKay, owner of McKay Landscape Lighting in Omaha, Neb. — but not at the expense of the quality of his company’s work. He’s cautious about expanding offerings, typically adding a few new lighting products to his firm’s lineup each year.

His company provides landscape lighting design, installation and maintenance for an 80 percent residential and 20 percent commercial clientele. McKay Landscape Lighting tests all of the products first and works with a few manufacturers it has built longstanding relationships with. One of those is Auroralight.

“We aren’t going to buy something off of the Internet and try it out,” McKay says. “Our reputation is too important.”

McKay also considers how effective new products are in terms of lighting trends, including the recent popularity of color-changing lights. McKay’s team tried these lights in a few places, but the results weren’t up to its standard. So, McKay stopped using them.

“Sometimes it’s OK not to go with the

newest, greatest thing until it’s proven,” McKay says.

WEATHER THE ELEMENTS

The first thing Adrian Palacios, owner of Landscape Designs in Fort Lauderdale, Fla., considers when it comes to new lighting products is reliability and durability in harsh environments.

“Landscape lighting gets the most abuse out of any lighting, whether that’s (abuse) from landscapers, lawn care companies, kids playing in the yard, public traffic or the high salt levels like we have here in South Florida,” Palacios says.

His company uses Kichler Lighting products and provides lighting services for landscapes, water features, docks and holidays. Landscape’s customers are 70 percent residential and 30 percent commercial, and the company has an annual revenue of \$1.8 million.



Lighting pros caution against going with trends without testing the products first.

With the electronic components that go into LED systems, Palacios says he’s careful to test new products to check the performance level.

“I see contractors who install a product but never see the end result, so they don’t know how good it is,” Palacios says. “If they install lighting up a 40-foot tree, they don’t know if it lights up at the top, if the beam span needs to be tightened or if there’s a lot of glare coming out of a fixture.”

CONSIDER DEMAND

Matt Murman, CAD department manager at California Pools and Landscape in Chandler, Ariz., encourages contractors not to add the whole catalog when expanding their lineup. A simple approach has worked for his company.

“Keep your offerings limited to what your clients are looking for with a few different design options for each light type,” Murman says.

The company has four locations and provides outdoor living services including landscaping, design/build, pools and landscape lighting. Its customers are about 90 percent residential and 10 percent commercial. California Pools and Landscape adds new, tested lighting products once or twice a year, depending on when its customers’ needs arise.

“We look to see if the product satisfies a need first. Secondly, we consider if it’s necessary to offer the product,” says Murman, who uses Vista Professional Outdoor Lighting. “Honestly, we

Continued on page 46

MAKE IT LAST
Choosing lighting products that can withstand the elements is a must.

BUSINESS BOOSTERS

KEEP IT SIMPLE
Add new lighting products bit by bit, based on what clients say they want.



Continued from page 45
attempt to keep our lighting offerings to a manageable portfolio both for internal management and for sourcing reasons.”

LONG-TERM WARRANTY

Not only does Darrin Selking, president of Landscape Illumination in Valparaiso,

Ind., test all products before putting them in a customer’s design, he also ensures the products will last for years to come.

“We try to install products that have at least a 10- to 15-year manufacturer warranty or longer because we don’t want our

clients to have to call us for service,” says Selking, who uses Kichler Lighting. “They should only have to call us if they want to add more stuff.”

Landscape Illumination offers landscape and seasonal lighting services to

about 80 percent residential and 20 percent commercial clients. The company’s annual revenue is around \$3 million. When considering a new product, Selking talks with other contractors who use the one he’s considering to get their feedback.

“Once I find a good product that works and is reliable, I’m going to stick with it,” Selking says. “Everything I put out there, I know it’s reliable.”

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.



Many lighting pros opt for products with long-term warranties to ensure products last.



PHOTOS: CALIFORNIA POOLS AND LANDSCAPE (TOP); LANDSCAPE ILLUMINATION (BOTTOM)



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4-IN-1 MULTIPURPOSE BUCKET



COMPANY: Takeuchi-U.S.

URL: Takeuchi-US.com

Takeuchi's 4-in-1 Multipurpose Bucket is designed to help users of compact track loaders and compact wheel loaders get more done with a single attachment. The bucket is available in both medium- and heavy-duty models in sizes ranging from 60 inches to 84 inches and in smooth or toothed configurations. Heavy-duty hinges and pins distribute the bucket's load evenly, while 0.5-inch connect-under-pressure couplers simplify hose connections. The bucket's long-floor design improves operator visibility to its cutting edge for greater precision during use. High-tensile steel side plates support greater breakout force. An optional bolt-on tooth bar fits over the bucket's bolt-on edge, improving its ability to break through highly compacted material. An optional spill guard increases the bucket's capacity.

Attachments



TILTROTATE SYSTEM FOR CAT MINI EXCAVATORS

COMPANY: Caterpillar

URL: Caterpillar.com

Caterpillar Work Tools now have a TiltRotate System (TRS) for Cat Next Gen mini excavators. The new TRS6 and TRS8 models allow attached work tools (including buckets, forks, grapples, brooms and compactors) to rotate 360 degrees and tilt 40 degrees side to side, enabling the machine to reach more work areas from a single position, while maneuvering tools over, under and around obstructions. The new TRS models are available in various configurations to match the application. TRS models have two interfaces: a top interface that connects the TRS to the carrier machine and a bottom interface that connects various work tools to the TRS. The four configurations for the TRS6 allow the user to choose between an S-Type hydraulic-coupler or pin-on top interface and whether the TRS is equipped with an integral grapple. All TRS6 models use an S-Type hydraulic coupler for the bottom interface.

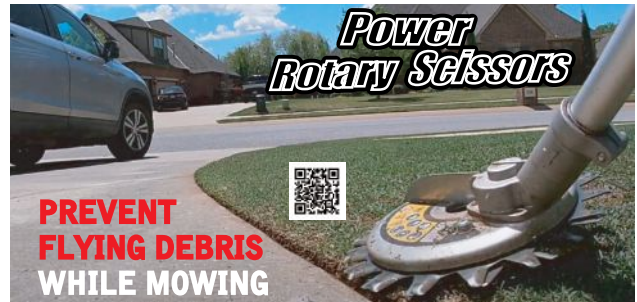


SVP18 VIBRATORY PLOW ATTACHMENT

COMPANY: Vermeer

URL: Vermeer.com

The Vermeer SVP18 vibratory plow attachment for mini skid-steers is designed for landscaping applications on compact job sites. With the ability to install items up to 12 inches deep using either a chute-style or pull-style blade, the SVP18 vibratory plow delivers better productivity than digging irrigation lines by hand in residential areas. A 50-degree swing angle allows the attachment and mini skid-steer to make tight turns around obstacles. The 6-inch height of the plow's tamping feet provides improved tractive efforts than previous models.



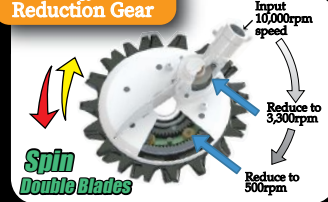
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CASE STUDY

Smart controllers, smart operators

One irrigation contractor shares his experience with smart controllers

BY SARAH WEBB | LM MANAGING EDITOR

Peter Novak, CEO and president of Serpico Landscaping in Hayward, Calif., gives his take on using smart irrigation controllers.

LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT: CAN YOU TALK TO ME ABOUT YOUR EXPERIENCE WITH SMART CONTROLLERS?

PETER NOVAK: We started using weather-based irrigation controllers (aka smart controllers) back in 2005, and at that time, they were new technology. Not a lot of people knew what they were about, so we spent the next several years developing not only benefits as to why we would recommend them to our clients but also training in-house on how to use them.

LM: SINCE THAT TIME, HAVE YOU STAYED LOYAL TO ONE BRAND?

NOVAK: We've used all kinds of different brands. We like to make sure that we are recommending what we believe is the best solution for our clients, so we spent a lot of time in the past testing different makes and models, both at our facilities and actually in field, and so we don't really have a loyalty to one particular make and model.

If we're talking about specific applications, the way we determine that is basically by area. For example, if we have a homeowners' association with a thousand homes in it and a lot of area to cover, then we'd choose something more commercially oriented, something that's going to have extra durability, extra support from the manufacturer, like a HydroPoint, the Pro Series controllers, or even an ET Water controller.

For something that's not 900 homes or a corporate campus, we'll talk to the client and say, 'Do you have any preferences?' We'll take those into consideration, but if there are no preferences, then we may suggest something from Rain Bird, Hunter or Irritrol.

LM: ACROSS THE BOARD WITH THOSE SMART CONTROLLERS, HOW HAVE THEY MADE YOUR OPERATION MORE EFFICIENT?

NOVAK: Typically, what we see is about a 20 to 30 percent improvement in water-use efficiency if we're just doing a nice smart controller installation. If you upgrade heads or you upgrade to high-efficiency nozzles, then that improves that.

In terms of for the company, smart controllers help the contractor spend less time manually checking the boxes and the actual physical controller. It has helped streamline our operations because our techs can do run-through inspections on their phones and iPads that we give them. That all translates



into better margins on everything for the company, whether it's inspections, isolating repairs, making repairs, or even the reporting back and forth of what we found. Labor's really expensive right now, so anything a company can do to maximize their technician time and still deliver the same or better result is definitely a plus.

↑ TRAIN THE TECHS
Be sure technicians are trained on how to properly handle irrigation technology.

LM: IS THERE ANYTHING OTHER IRRIGATION CONTRACTORS SHOULD KEEP IN MIND BEFORE IMPLEMENTING THIS TYPE OF TECHNOLOGY?

NOVAK: Absolutely. I'd say the biggest fail that we see is other contractors making a recommendation, selling the client a spiffy, shiny new box, but they have no idea how to control that box. It's really important that if you have a smart controller, you also have a smart person, someone who's trained, who knows how to make the most of it.

That includes getting your staff trained completely, whether it's through the Irrigation Association or the California Landscape Contractors Association or another industry association or a local irrigation guru. Without proper training, it will actually result in a decline in results.

LM: IS THERE ANYTHING ELSE YOU WOULD LIKE TO ADD?

NOVAK: The contractor should make sure the client understands that this is a service that comes at an extra cost, and so while it's nice to say, 'We recommend the smart controller. It's going to do all these cool things for you, and you're going to save water,' ultimately, you have to let them know, 'Hey, this is a service add. It's an additional service, and these things cost money.' 🗣️

Peter Novak



SRP STRIP LIGHTS: Simple. Stylish. Spectacular.

New SRP Strip Lights add eye-catching effects to outdoor living spaces in just three easy steps. All you have to do is insert, slide, and snap! The built-in diffuser delivers soft, even lighting without hot spots, and premade cutmarks make customization a breeze.

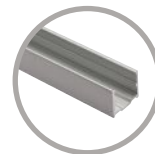
Everything you need is included:



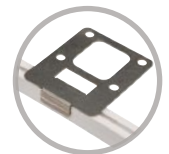
Jumper Cables



End Connectors



Aluminum Sleeve



Hardscape Bracket

RECOMMENDER

What do you use to dig trenches and why?

Trenching equipment can be an irrigation installer's most used tool.



STEVE STOKELY

OWNER,
STEVE STOKELY
LANDSCAPING
SAND SPRINGS, OKLA.

I use a Case/Davis articulated trencher/backhoe. I needed something small enough to get through gates and into yards. I use it for burying pipes for drainage, sprinkler systems and water features. Also, I use it for digging footings for retaining walls. A few features of the machine that are advantageous to my needs are the attached backhoe and it is articulated.



ERIC MOROSKI

CO-OWNER, WEISBURG
LANDSCAPE MAINTENANCE
COLORADO SPRINGS, COLO.

We have two GeoRipper mini trenchers and three small skid implement trenchers we use on our Ditch Witch mini stand-on skid-steers and Toro Dingos. Trenchers allow more work to be done with less people. The GeoRipper is great for small projects that an irrigation technician will get into while maintaining commercial systems (adding heads, fixing a freeze break, etc.). The machine can just be loaded into a van or truck. The GeoRipper is great at cutting in where heads are going from the lateral on new system installations. It also works great at facilitating edging installation. It does not make sense to use a GeoRipper for anything over 1-inch in diameter, heavy soils and long runs. Those are jobs for a walk-behind or attachment.



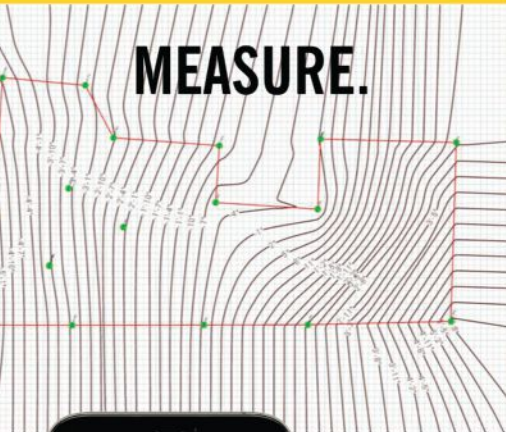
SHANNON SPEIGEL

RESIDENTIAL PROJECT
MANAGER, ANDY'S SPRINKLER,
DRAINAGE & LIGHTING
DALLAS, TEXAS

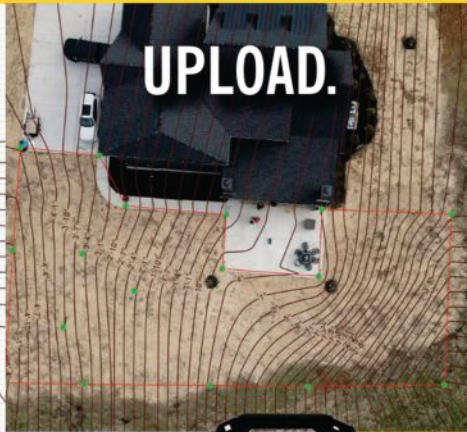
We use sharpshooters and clean-out trenching shovels 90 percent of the time. When it comes to the drainage aspect, it takes more time to go in and backfill or take out dirt when we hit undulations versus just hand digging it the first time. In our opinion, it's a better product. Our two main goals in our company, whether it be irrigation or drainage, are aesthetics and functionality. I want my system, whether it be irrigation or drainage, to be able to function under any conditions. More than likely, a client has invested a lot of money into the landscape. I don't want the irrigation or drainage to be an eyesore in what is likely a highly trafficked area on a property. By hand digging everything, at the end of the project, it's a substantially better product.

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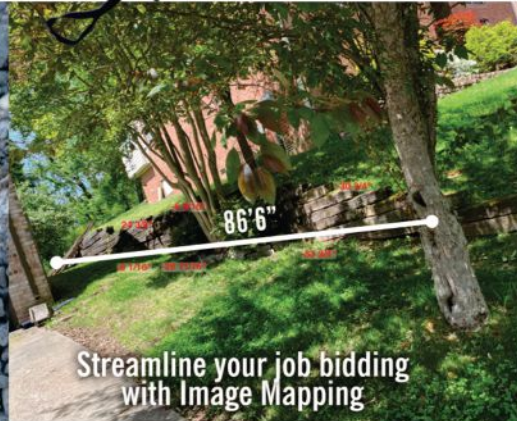
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FIVE QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Josh Perkins

**PRESIDENT, PLANT STUDIO LANDSCAPES
MUNCIE, IND.**

1 Tell me about how you got into the business.

I'm a landscape architecture grad from Ball State. I did three internships: one design/build; one in a design-only office; and one in an environmental restoration company. That allowed me to see the business through some different lenses. When I graduated, I went and worked in the northern suburbs of Chicago, which is a fantastic market. We wanted to be closer to family, so we moved back to Muncie, and we started Plant Studio Landscapes six years ago. We're a landscape maintenance, landscape construction, landscape install (company). Three years ago, we got into doing in-ground pools.

2 What's a trend that you're seeing in your area?

Landscape contractors are now pool contractors. We had an opportunity three years ago to get into it ... so we got into it a little ahead of COVID. It's odd to talk about the opportunities COVID brought us. I think we were all scared to death. We shut down for a week. We didn't know how to manage this or how to handle employees. We just took an abundance of precaution, and then we kept pushing. All of a sudden, we went from 'We have a couple of pools to build,' to 'Our year is sold out.' The same with next year.

3 What's your favorite tool in the shop?

The No. 1 thing we use is our Vermeer mini skid-steer. That's the most valuable piece of equipment that we own, the most bang for the buck. People fight over it. Now we've got to get another one. It's just so handy on every job we do. I had no idea how handy it would be when we bought it.

4 What's labor like in your area and do you have the workforce you need?

I don't think anybody has the workforce they need. We have done a better job this year. Culture is the buzzword right now, but we think it's more than that. We made some changes internally. I grew my business by push, push, push. Don't whine and complain, just get it done, but I wasn't focused on my team the way that I

should (have been), and I wasn't listening. The first thing we did, and it was hard, we had to do a little pruning: the guys who didn't want to work with others or came in late or a variety of problems. As an owner, you're just looking for bodies, and I was stuck in that cycle. Finally, I said, we have to cut them loose, and we're going to do what we can with the good guys we have. Within two weeks, we noticed the attitudes change. Once I saw that, I bought in. So then, I focused on how to take care of the good guys we have. We started doing events, breakfasts, lunches, a pool day, a bowling day. Those things have been huge for my team.

5 What is your most memorable day at work?

When I first started my business, I was scared to death. I've got a wife and two young kids, and I went from a sales guy with a nice income to, 'It's all on me now.' I remember a business owner told me, 'In two years, you will have somebody who can run your business for one week, and while you're away, the world won't come crashing down.' I remember taking my first family vacation and being at ease thinking, they can handle this. At times, as owners, we see ourselves as too grandiose when our employees are quite capable. The other one ... getting to \$1 million seemed like a really big deal. I remember the night I ran the invoices — it was in the middle of the week — I went and got a bottle of champagne and popped the cork. I probably should have waited until Friday because I felt a little rough the next day. 🍾

BEST ADVICE

"Nathan Stockman out of Pennsylvania, I was so impressed by the way he talked about his team. I was envious. I remember thinking, 'If I were an employee, I'd want to work for Nathan.' Then I realized ... I want people to think that about me. So, culture. It's changed my business."



PHOTO: PATTY CASTILLO



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BY PHIL HARWOOD

The author is president and CEO of Pro-Motion Consulting. Reach him at Phil@GrowTheBench.com.

The benefits of scenario planning

In this month's edition of *Landscape Management*, we are being encouraged to look into the future. How will the industry change in the next five to 10 years? Which innovations tested today will become standards and which will be memories? What will our businesses look like in the midst of these changes?

Trying to forecast the future may seem unproductive at first glance. After all, there are many things outside of our control. From that perspective, we are merely passengers along for the ride. All we can do is look out the windows and enjoy the scenery. Life happens to us, and there is nothing we can do about it. I disagree with this mentality.

VALUE IN PLANNING AHEAD

In my experience, there absolutely is value in looking ahead and planning our futures to the best of our ability. This approach helps us prepare for what lies ahead, even though we may not know specifically what it is. It

also promotes having others, who may be affected, provide input into decisions.

The reality is that we are not merely passengers, even though it may seem like it at times. There is no reason we can't take hold of the steering wheel and be the driver, acting with purpose and intention to create a desired outcome. This is a much better approach in my opinion.

As we create plans for the future, one of the most helpful processes is to create multiple scenarios. This may be done as part of a long-term strategic planning process, or it may be done as part of a short-term decision-making process. An example of the short-term decision-making process may be helpful.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Let's say that you are a business owner, are contemplating hiring a general manager and have never done this before. A general manager would be disruptive to the status quo, but you see many positive reasons to move forward with this decision. On the other hand, you also see some potentially negative consequences due to the disruption that is likely to occur. You are conflicted.

In this example, it would be helpful for you and your inner circle to create two or more scenarios. Fully develop both scenarios to better understand the pros, cons and implications of each option.

Scenario A may be to hire the general manager. Scenario B may be to not hire the general manager. Scenario C may be to hire the general manager, but not in the general manager position initially, in order to

allow staff an opportunity to warm up to this person before promoting them to the general manager role.

The same type of thought process applies to longer-term strategic planning. Let's say you are considering adding a new service line to your business model. This is a big decision with great opportunity but also some risk. Before making a decision, it would be helpful for you and your leadership team to fully analyze several scenarios. Fully develop the pros, cons and implications of each option and then make a decision.

By applying this extra step of scenario analysis to your decision-making process, you'll be forced to slow down your decision-making, fully appreciate each alternative scenario and make better decisions. You and your team will be the beneficiaries of this collaborative process.

When we don't slow down to weigh different options, we often make bad decisions, but when we take the time to roll up our sleeves and engage in a scenario-planning exercise, we make the best decision possible with the information available at that time.

Of course, things don't always turn out as planned. That's what makes life interesting, but that doesn't mean we stop planning. It just means we have an opportunity to go back to the drawing board with more information.

As you think about the next five to 10 years, I encourage you to make the effort to do some scenario planning with your team. I believe you will not only enjoy the process, but you will make better decisions.

Now go forth. 🇺🇸





BY JEFF KORHAN

Jeff Korhan is the author of *Built-In Social*, founder of Landscape Digital Institute and a Duct Tape Marketing Certified consultant. Reach him at jeff@landscapedigitalinstitute.com.

How to gain more and better referrals

Did you know that regardless of their level of satisfaction, less than one-third of consumers will take the initiative to make a referral?

It's your responsibility to teach your clients, especially your champions, how to refer your business. You'll have to give them an occasional nudge, possibly an incentive and, most importantly, the tools to make it easier.

WHY REFERRALS ARE IMPORTANT

- Your ideal customers are likely to refer others who value the same things.
- Referrals shorten the sales cycle because the referred prospects are inclined to trust you.
- The best referrals will willingly pay for premium service.
- Referrals increase the lifetime value of every customer.

A REFERRAL PROCESS

Referrals can come from clients, friends in the community and employees. To help all of them, you should have a referral process that guides the experience.

A landing page that explains the problems your company solves is essential. That page should show what it's like to work with your company. This is an opportunity to clarify your uniqueness, what makes your company the right choice for its ideal clients. Consider adding videos to your landing page.

Videos are a powerful tool for humanizing your business. Use testimonial videos from clients or employees to give people a sense of who you are and your work environment. Show how your business takes its clients to a better place. Studies

“Create tools and build awareness to make referrals a byproduct of your company's daily activities.”

show that buyers are 50 percent more likely to trust the messaging from employees than the brand.

In addition to growing revenue, referrals are likely your most valuable recruiting tool. Create another landing page that speaks to what's most relevant to potential employees. Once again, a powerful approach is having a current team member share his or her story in a 90-second video. You want these to be honest and authentic, in the employee's words.

Every referral starts with an introduction. To make a favorable first impression when introduced, you must help your clients or other referral partners get it right. The easier you make it for them, the more likely they will follow through with it.

To make a favorable first impression when introduced, you must help your clients or other referral partners get it right. The easier you make this for them, the more likely they will follow through with it.

A short introductory email that includes some or all the following is a great start to a referral process:

- How to spot your ideal client
- Your company's primary distinction
- Trigger words and phrases clients like to hear
- Your process, how you deliver value
- A link to a landing page that tells your story

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

If a referral will be answered by you, the owner, then you must have a process in place to ensure that happens. Whenever possible, ask to be notified when a referral is made. This gives you the opportunity to set in motion your process designed to honor the referring partner and his or her referral.

A referral process is specific to your company and the community it serves. It's ongoing education for employees, clients and business partners that helps them help you expand the audience your company serves. This may include:

- Offering incentives to employees
- Publicly thanking referring partners in your newsletter
- Creating co-marketing with similar businesses
- Rating, reviewing and referring other businesses
- Hosting and supporting community events and charitable causes

According to research conducted by referral network Alignable, 85 percent of small business owners claim referrals drive the majority of their new business. That's why it's necessary to have a referral structure to encourage this type of growth.

Texas Tech University conducted a survey that revealed 83 percent of satisfied customers are willing to make a referral, but only 29 percent actually do.

Most people believe referrals are happy accidents, but this research shows they are available for any company willing to do the work. Create tools and build awareness to make referrals a byproduct of your company's daily activities.



BY BOB MANN

The author is the director of state and local government relations for the National Association of Landscape Professionals. Reach him at Bob@landscapeprofessionals.org.

If you're not at the table, you're on the menu

Someone recently described owning a business as being like sitting down and having a Red Bull to relax. It's tough at the best of times but recent months have been, let's say, challenging. Prices of goods are soaring with no end in sight, available labor is all but nonexistent and the only thing we have ample supply of is uncertainty.

I have been speaking with people about their reactions to the current economic situation. One friend told me that he was taking delivery of enough fertilizer to take him through August of next year. Folks, that is a lot of fertilizer.

Contemplate for a moment: Urea, the most common nitrogen fertilizer source in the lawn and landscape industry, is a globally traded commodity. Just to give you an idea of how crazy urea prices have been over the past year, the 52-week price on the futures market has ranged from \$282.50 per ton to a high last month of \$782, a nearly threefold increase. Worse yet, over the past five years, the average price of urea in Novem-

“In the new year, make it a priority to dedicate time to advancing the lawn care and landscape industry.”


ber has been \$147.33. Incredible! No wonder that Red Bull looks like a cup of chamomile tea lately.

In an age when responses to help-wanted advertisements are largely restricted to people who need to justify their ongoing unemployment benefits, our industry has steadily turned to equipment to replace manual labor, but now, our industry is under assault as local, and state political leaders seek to ban small gasoline-powered engines based upon emissions and leaf blowers based upon excessive noise. As of this writing, there is a new law in California that will ban the sale of small off-road engines. We expect copycat legislation to be filed in many states as new legislative terms begin in January.

manner of misinformation. If you are not there to counter their narrative, how is the politician to know any better? Many times, in conversation with a politician or a member of their staff, they will tell us that they do not hear from members of the lawn care and landscape industry.

Indeed, one of the first experiences I had when I started with NALP was to attend a meeting of a county council in Florida that was debating a ban on the application of fertilizer during certain months of the year. The policy was the opposite of what was being recommended by university turfgrass researchers.

Long story short, the county council voted in the fertilizer ban, much to our disappointment, but on my way back to Orlando to grab a plane back to Boston, I passed so many lawn care trucks. None of those companies showed up at that meeting. Not one. And now, their county government had banned them from applying fertilizer. Were none of these companies aware of the proposed ordinance? Where are they going to go to make up for the lost revenue? All I could think of is the old saying about politics: If you aren't at the table, you're on the menu.

In the new year, make it a priority to dedicate time to advancing the lawn care and landscape industry. If you do not belong to your state lawn, landscape or nursery association, now is the time to join. And don't stop there, either. Our state associations need volunteers like you to serve. If you've never done this kind of work, give it a try. I have always gotten back far more than I invested. You won't be sorry. I promise. 



IT'S TIME TO SPEAK UP

This doesn't automatically mean that any of these bills will pass and become law, however. This is where your participation is crucial. People who advocate for banning things like fertilizers, pesticides and leaf blowers do not know about your struggles keeping your business going and putting food on the table. And quite frankly, they don't care. They will march into a politician's office and loudly proclaim all

PHOTO: PAUL BRADBURY/OJO IMAGES/GETTY IMAGES

SERIOUS INJURIES ON THE RISE

BY SARAH WEBB
LM MANAGING EDITOR

While the total number of injuries in the landscape industry has fallen since 2001, the percentage of serious injuries has increased from 16 percent to 21 percent from 2001 to 2017, according to a recent study by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health.

The study was based on workers' compensation data from Ohio and other states. It identified common factors leading to injuries and illnesses in the landscaping services industry and evaluated 18,037 workers' compensation claims from 2001–2017. Of those claims, 3,311 were serious injuries.

“Because we’re able to take a much closer look at each case, we have a better identification of the actual hazards, how it happened and suggestions on how we can mitigate those hazards they’re experiencing,” says Sam Steel, Ed.D., safety adviser for the National Association of Landscape Professionals. “The new study enables us to figure out specifically what happened in that case and how we can go about developing a training program or mentorship program for new workers.”

Steel says more hands-on training may help reduce the number of serious injuries.

“We’re a much more high-tech industry than we used to be. I believe the higher number of serious injuries is tied to the new technology of more powerful, larger equipment,” Steel says. “For our industry,



a lecture at a tailgate training out in the field, where it’s one-way communication between the trainer and trainees, is not very effective.”

For example, if a company is conducting zero-turn mower training, Steel recommends putting the operators on the machine, having them demonstrate all of the safe operating procedures and then evaluating whether the training was effective or not by observing the workers at the worksite.


“The training needs to keep pace with the technology,” Steel adds. 

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RESOURCES



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.



Why everything rises and falls with leadership

The biggest challenge I expect most landscape professionals will face in 2022 is with finding and keeping team members. At Grunder Landscaping Co. (GLC), we're already thinking about what we need to do to be successful when the busy season returns for us in March.

We are constantly talking about how we can do a better job of keeping the great team members we have because great team members are hard to come by. We know that first and foremost, we do this by making our company a great place to work.

We do a lot at GLC to make sure our team members know we appreciate them: We have cookouts, we do company events, we drop off Gatorades and snacks to job sites, we periodically buy everyone lunch and we always remember our team members' birthdays and work anniversaries. These little things add up, but I'm not naive enough to believe that someone

“We also need to think about how we make our team's roles enjoyable and fulfilling daily.”

will stay in a job they don't enjoy just because they get a treat every so often. We absolutely need to keep doing these small gestures, but we also need to think about how we make our team's roles enjoyable and fulfilling daily.

Our crews spend about 30 minutes a day at our shop on average, and our leadership team may or may not speak to them at all during that time. In contrast, team members are spending eight hours a day with their crews. The two other people on the crew are really who will help them love their jobs or drive them to quit.

EMPHASIS ON SOFT SKILLS

This winter, we're investing in training our whole team, as we always do, and we're putting a special focus on training

our team leaders on soft skills. Our team leaders are the managers on-site with crews daily, and we need them to be as skilled in leadership, communication and conflict management as they are in caring for our clients' properties. We want to equip them to be the best leaders they can be so the culture within their crews is so strong that people don't want to leave.

We did our first soft-skills training with them in October. I led it with our 20 team leaders before they went out on job sites for the day. We talked about the types of leaders we enjoy working for and what makes them special. My goal was to get them thinking: Am I the type of leader I would want to work for? How could I do a better job of leading and mentoring my direct reports? What do I know that I can teach my crew, and how can I help them to learn and grow, too? I was impressed with how engaged and interested they were.

When the busy season hits, all of us will likely be working hard to find new team members. In that quest, make sure you don't overlook the talent already on your team. Take time each week to train, educate and mentor them on both technical skills and soft skills. My team has done a great job getting talent in the door, and now it's our job to train them and be the best leaders we can be for them. Everything rises and falls with leadership.

We'll start 2022 at The Grow Group with a series of virtual events designed to help teams with teaching and growing their teams: “Build a Winning Training Program,” “Finding & Fielding a Winning Team” and “Time Management for Landscape Pros” are all on the schedule. Learn more: growgroupinc.com/winning-training-program. 



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