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[CALL FOR ENTRIES]

LM150

Just a few more weeks left to get in your entry for this year's LM150!

Visit LandscapeManagement.net/its-lm150-time-submit-your-entry-form-by-april-1/ or

check your inbox for the LM150 form from Special Projects Editor Marisa Palmieri. Complete it by April 1 and stay tuned for the June issue where we'll reveal this year's rankings.

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Show me a hero

Recently, I was the guest on the Green Industry Perspectives podcast, hosted by our friends at SingleOps. There's no telling how the podcast went — I'm more acclimated to being the one asking the questions. But, I did have fun speaking about our magazine, my expectations for 2021 and some of our big annual projects like the LM150 and our LM Industry Pulse (for the podcast or to apply for the LM150, visit [LandscapeManagement.net](https://www.LandscapeManagement.net).)

One of the questions host Ty Deemer asked me was what kind of stories resonate most with our readers.

I have my philosophies on that, and I do look at our website metrics to see which stories get the most clicks, but the most basic answer I could give at that moment was "hero stories."

We tell hero stories in the magazine all the time. A hero story doesn't have to be about life and death. Anyone who overcomes adversity and helps another, to me, that's a hero. Just check out our cover story, "7 ways to grow your hard-scape business" by Editor Christina Herrick on page 12. There are plenty of heroes in that story. Everyone she spoke to was willing to help others and share their wisdom with us and our readers.

The GrassRoots Turf family came together to support their own.

Sure, there are different levels of

"A hero story doesn't have to be about life and death. Anyone who overcomes adversity and helps another, to me, that's a hero."

hero stories, but they're all stories worthy of being told.

One such story comes out of Acworth, Ga., on the north side of Atlanta. GrassRoots Turf, founded in 2002 by Josh Wise, saw some tragedy befall their team last year around the holidays. First, a technician was in a bad car accident. Then, another employee was injured in a fall. Lastly, there is a married couple who both work for the company. Their son was in a terrible accident and severely burned.

Wise said he was beside himself by this point and began to pray for help for his employees. His heart was uplifted just a few weeks later.

"The whole company, everybody came together for a dinner — we couldn't do our normal party because of COVID," Wise recalls. "We were getting hit hard. We talked about how can we as a company come together and help these families in their time of need? (At the dinner,

it was uplifting and touching to me to see every single employee put cash in a pot or donate some of their PTO time so these employees didn't have to go without pay."

Wise says he tries hard to take

care of his employees. His philosophy is, if the company is taking care of the employee, the employee is taking care of the customer. In this case, the employees were taking care of each other.

"It made me feel awesome — that's the family atmosphere that I want between all our employees," Wise told me. "It's not just a job where everyone punches in and out on a clock, and then everyone goes home. We all care about each other. It gave me that warm fuzzy feeling."

Here's another one that happened last month during Winter Storm Uri. Many areas were hit, but the blackouts in Texas were especially dangerous. Aaron Carter, vice president of customer service for Emerald Lawns, was without power for almost a full week. His family of six camped out in the living room, using the fireplace to stay warm.

When one of Carter's neighbors ran out of firewood, he shared some of his own supply, even though he was also low. He put out the call to a few friends.

"It was like firewood came down like manna from Heaven," he recalls. "We had friends crawling out of the woodwork dropping off firewood."

So much firewood came in that he told his friends to pile it on the corner of the driveway so other families in need could grab some. By his estimate, his friends supplied enough firewood to keep six families warm while the power was out.


Whether it's sharing business insights or firewood, I consider these hero stories. It's our pleasure to tell them. 



PHOTO: GRASSROOTS TURF



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

What are you reading for business ideas or insight?



"The best book on the idea of how to run a business is 'Traction' by Gino Wickman. It is right behind the best bible for a startup, 'The E-Myth,' by Michael Gerber."

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.

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Phil Harwood

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Grand Rapids, Mich.

Kevin Kehoe

3PG Consulting
Laguna, Calif.

Jeffrey Scott

Jeffrey Scott Consulting
New Orleans, La.



"I just reread, after a number of years, 'Rich Dad Poor Dad.'"

"Marketing Made Simple: A Step-by-Step Storybrand Guide for Any Business' by Donald Miller."



"I recently read 'The Psychology of Money' by Morgan Housel. I gave it to all my kids for Christmas, and two of my children have already read it. It's about the impact of how you spend your money, what you think about money and how you earn your money. We live in some challenging times, and the lessons in the book made an impact on me."



"The Art of Selling Your Business' by John Warrillow."



"Finish Big' by Bo Burlingham for insights and stories on setting up your business for a profitable succession before it's time and 'The Infinite Game' by Simon Sinek for developing a purpose-based business. I am also reading nonbusiness books, like 'The Everyday Philanthropist.'"



"For leaders, I suggest reading history and biography — heads of state, generals and the times and conflicts in which they were involved. You can learn all you need to know about how to and how not to act as a leader — and how to manage people and events."



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Landscapers respond to Winter Storm Uri

BY ABBY HART | LM SENIOR EDITOR AND SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Landscape companies jumped into action in response to Winter Storm Uri, which hit the U.S. on Monday, Feb. 15. The storm brought heavy snowfall and subzero temperatures to states such as Texas, Oklahoma and Tennessee — places that don't typically see freezing temperatures in February.

Aaron Carter, vice president of customer service for Emerald Lawns, lives in Hutto, Texas, a suburb of Austin. His family, including his wife, 15-year-old twins, a 10-year-old and a 9-year-old, did not realize what the storm had in store for them.

"We went to bed on Sunday ready for the storm," Carter said. "We fully expected everything to be fine the next day and woke up on Monday morning

with no power and no water coming into the house. I thought, well, they'll get everything back up soon. Monday turned into Tuesday, Tuesday turned into Wednesday ... finally, it was Friday around 6 p.m. that we got power back in our house."

Luke Hawthorne, owner, Emerald Lawns in Round Rock, Texas, has lived in Texas his whole life and said he's never seen anything like what they just endured. He considers himself lucky — living across from a hospital, he only lost power for three hours. Everyone else he knows, like Carter, lost power anywhere from three days to a week.

"It was surreal; you felt like you were in a movie. You know those 'end of the world' movies where everything freezes?" Hawthorne said. "It lasted so

long. The ice started on Sunday, and it didn't go away until Friday."

Emerald Lawns was forced to shut down for the week, Hawthorne said.

Mark Hopkins, executive vice president, central division for LandCare, leads a territory covering Texas, Oklahoma, Tennessee, Georgia and North Carolina.

Customers all over his territory have felt the effects of the storm. "We've had customers with sprinklers burst in their warehouses, and there are team members affected by this," he said. "It's to be determined what the impact will be from a landscape standpoint."

He said the plant loss will be significant, adding that he recently spoke with a regional vice president

A LandCare truck plows snow in Nashville during Winter Storm Uri.



PHOTO: KATIE NEWBERN

who reported that one of his sites in Texas might be dealing with more than a quarter of a million dollars of plant loss.

**LandCare
Executive VP
Mark Hopkins
manned a
skid-steer
during the
snowstorm in
Oklahoma.**

Chris Lee, president of Earthworks in Lillian, Texas, said, "I think (the storm) caught a lot of people off guard, because we're used to hearing that there will be a crazy storm and that it will be bad and all this snow, but it never happens," Lee said. "They nailed it this time."

Lee said his company knew it wouldn't be working on Feb. 15 and that there were going to be rolling blackouts. The longest span the Lees had without power was 18 or 20 hours.

He says Earthworks will be dealing with the aftermath of the storm for the rest of this year and probably a good portion of next year.

"We feel certain we've lost several varieties of shrubs and succulents, palm trees," Lee said. "There's a lot of stuff dead and a lot that won't come back."



The weather in Texas has moved on, however. Lee reported that Dallas had started to thaw out by the end of the week and over the weekend.

"Monday (Feb. 22), it's back to work as normal, and Tuesday, it's 80 degrees," he said. "You'd never know what happened last week, unless you look at the plants." 📷

Bayer to divest turf and ornamental portfolio

Bayer plans to divest its Environmental Science Professional business, which includes turf and ornamental, professional pest management, vector control, industrial vegetation management and forestry products.

The company said this move will allow it to focus on the core agricultural business in its Crop Science division. The Environmental Science Professional business had sales of approximately \$728 million in 2019.

Bayer named Jacqueline M. Applegate, Ph.D., to lead Crop Science North America beginning March 1. She currently heads the division's Environmental Science and Vegetable Seeds businesses. Bayer also named Gilles Galliou, currently head of commercial operations for Bayer Vegetable

Seeds Americas, to lead the Environmental Science business and the planned divestment. The global Environmental Science business will be headquartered in Cary, N.C., effective June 1.

SavATree acquires Big Twigs in Michigan

SavATree has purchased Big Twigs Arboricultural Services of Orion, Mich. This location will become SavATree's second office in Michigan and 51st branch office. Terms of the transaction were not disclosed.

"We're thrilled to join forces with Big Twigs, a reputable company known for outstanding service," said SavATree CEO Carmine Schiavone. "Building density in Oakland, Macomb and Wayne counties will provide clients with an enhanced portfolio of services as we continue to uphold an environmentally responsible approach."

Big Twigs has provided a loyal customer base in the Detroit tri-county area with general tree care and plant health care services.

Green Image joins BrightView

BrightView acquired Green Image (GTI), based in Las Vegas. Terms of the transaction were not disclosed.

"GTI and its more than 400 team members are a great strategic addition to our operations in the Western U.S.," said BrightView President and CEO Andrew Masterman. "They bring a solid base of maintenance operations, plus an impressive capability in landscape development. This team of professionals has years of experience in horticulture, engineering, maintenance, design, architecture and equipment management, and I am pleased to welcome them to BrightView."

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Founded in 2004, GTI has earned a reputation throughout Nevada for the quality of its work in both landscape development and maintenance, including HOA streetscapes and entries, parks, common areas, play structures, athletic fields and water features.

SingleOps releases 2021 Green Industry Economic Report

SingleOps published its 2021 Green Industry Economic Report. The report includes data from thousands of green industry professionals in commercial and residential landscaping and tree care businesses in North America

who used SingleOps in 2020.

A key takeaway from the report is that landscape and tree care businesses persevered in 2020 despite challenges brought on by the pandemic, and various metrics indicate that the industry as a whole performed well.

The 2021 Green Industry Economic Report is similar to previous economic reports published by SingleOps. It includes key industry metrics such as proposal acceptance rate, time to payment and revenue per hour. In creating the report, SingleOps analyzed more than 700,000 proposed jobs totaling \$1.4 billion and nearly 400,000 accepted jobs totaling nearly \$700 million.

Rain Bird CEO dies

Anthony W. "Tony" LaFetra, 80, president and CEO of Rain Bird Corp., died on Jan. 29.



Tony LaFetra

Rain Bird said he will be remembered as a passionate business leader whose work has had a lasting impact on the irrigation industry, generations of employees and the community. LaFetra built the irrigation company in Glendora, Calif., into an international market leader. LaFetra worked hard to promote the company's guiding principle, "the intelligent use of water," around the globe.

He led the company's transformation from a manufacturer of brass impact sprinklers, primarily used in agriculture, to a provider of irrigation products used worldwide in landscapes, golf courses, sports fields and farms.

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7 WAYS TO GROW YOUR HARDSCAPE BUSINESS

Hardscape experts share how you can build on your successes and grow your business this year and in the future

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK
LM EDITOR



Sam Gembel

Sam Gembel, owner of Atlas Outdoor in Flint, Mich., has made almost every mistake along the road to \$5 million in annual revenue, he says.

"In our first four years of business, we didn't know what our vision was," he says of the company he founded with his wife in 2011. "We would even paint for people if they were willing to pay us. Our business grew quickly because we were too responsive to people's needs. It was like we were going on an awesome vacation, but we don't know how we're going to get there or really where we were going. We'll stop anywhere and say, 'Oh, this looks nice.'"

Gembel says his company became known for its rapid revenue growth. Atlas Outdoor provides lawn maintenance and design/build services to half residential and half commercial clients and performs commercial snow removal.

"We're the company that grew to \$5 million in

five years and had all of the mistakes that come with it," he says.

Gembel, Frank Bourque, former hardscape business owner turned consultant; Kenneth Deemer and Patrick Murray, managing partners of Local Roots Landscaping in Pittsburgh; Jerry NeSmith, co-owner of NeSmith Landscapes in Tallahassee, Fla.; Matt Griffin, president of Prime Lawn in Porter, Texas; and Clint Tucker, owner of Sugar Hill Outdoors in Buford, Ga., share the keys to their businesses' growth and give advice on how to grow a hardscape business.

1 HAVE A VISION

The first step on the road to growth, Bourque says, is understanding where you want your business to go.

"Business growth is not a sprint," he says. "Results come from you actually stepping back once in a while and taking a look at your business and saying 'OK, that used to work for us, but does it still work for us?'"

NeSmith says it's critical to know who you are as a business and where you want the business to go. NeSmith



Landscapes offers landscape and hardscape design/build, irrigation and landscape lighting to residential clients. He aims to be a one-stop shop that focuses on details. The business has steadily grown about \$300,000 every year for the last few years.

"If you lack a vision, you're floating in a boat with no paddles in the Gulf of Mexico," he says. "You're out there moving with the waves of responses and the economy."

Bourque started in the hardscape industry as a teen and started his own business in New Brunswick, Canada. He and several partners grew their business to 110 employees with two locations in two cities. He says part of the reason he sees having a vision as a critical part of a hardscape business is to ensure companies don't make the same mistakes he did.

"One challenging day, however, I was forced to step back and realized that I was not growing the



Frank Bourque

business I wanted," he says. "I realized I was more focused on growing a big company, when, in reality, we were growing bigger problems. We didn't have the right systems in place. I also realized that my

real dream was to build a profitable and systemized company where people are happy to work and where there is little or no dependence on owners."

Bourque implemented software to increase and track efficiency, invested in equipment and eliminated jobs and equipment that didn't add to the overall return on investment. Understanding the vision for a business, Bourque says, is a key part of growing a business in the right direction.

2 HIRE RIGHT

Deemer and Murray say they used to believe the myth that good employees were hard to find. However, this year, they filled all the Local Roots crew positions by mid-February.

"It's true, you don't have people lining up at your door like it used to be," Deemer says. "There's an effort to it. (We made a) serious investment both in our existing team and in finding and connecting with the right people to move forward."

For Deemer and Murray, it started with building the right culture for existing employees. Local Roots emphasizes providing good pay, benefits, a team atmosphere and a good work environment. The company's clientele is primarily residential, and it offers maintenance and design/build services. Local Roots has grown from \$52,000 in 2014 to \$2.4 million in 2020.

"The argument we refuse to believe was this idea that you can't hire good help," Murray says. "The issue is we can, but that comes at a cost. It's not just throwing money at people's faces

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CHICK-FIL-A OF HARDSCAPES

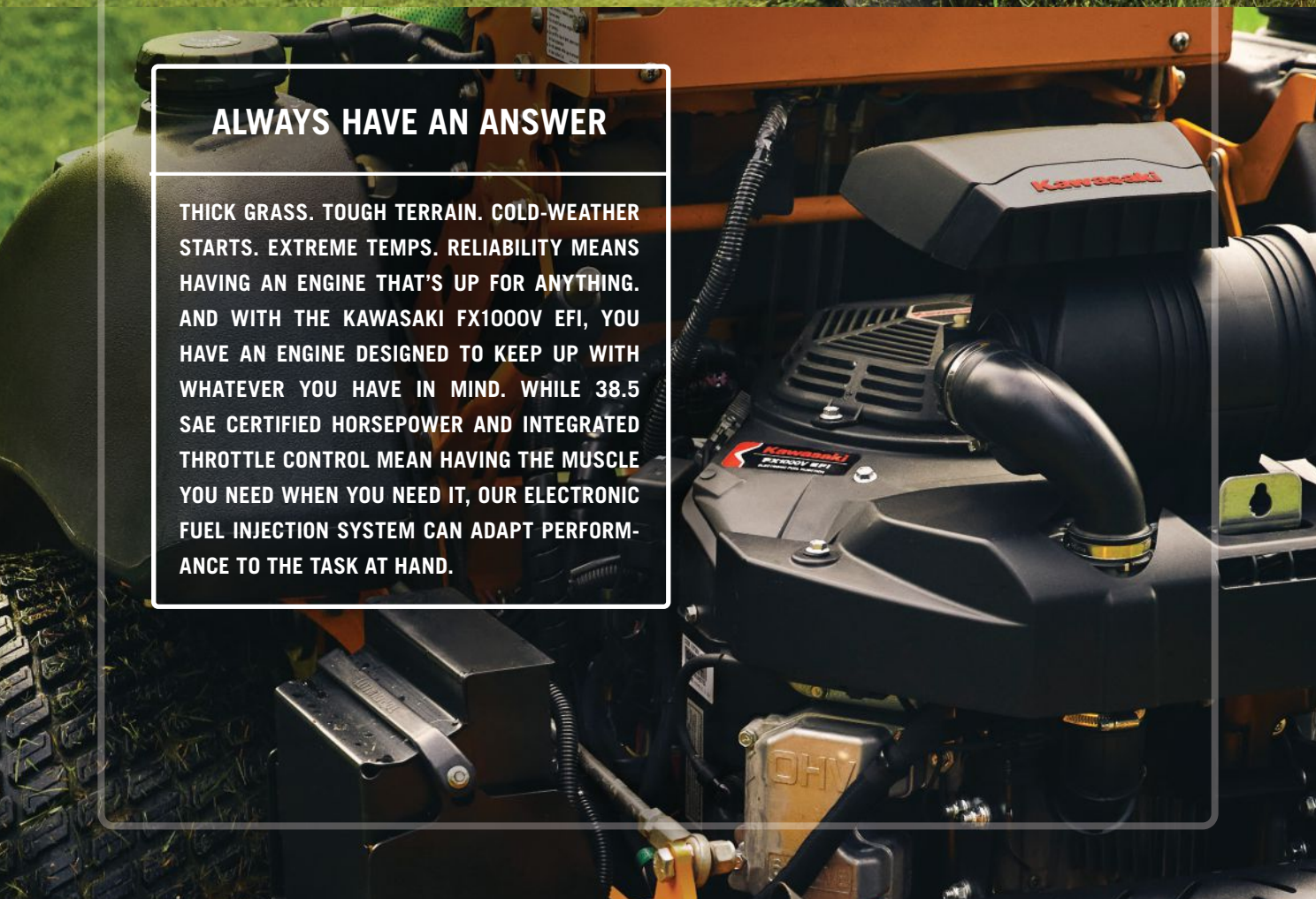
Atlas Outdoor employees model their customer service experience on the popular fast-food chain.



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Continued from page 13

anymore. People want a healthy, quality work environment.”

Deemer says the reputation he and Murray have built for Local Roots has paid off.

“It turns into a snowball effect that the more people that hear about it and want to be a part of it, that grows and attracts more good people,” he says.

ADVICE:

“You’ve got to put your feet on the ground, put your head down and focus on what you want to accomplish and who you are.

There’s nothing quick and easy about the hardscaping industry. You’ve got to be in it for the long haul, and you’ve got to have that passion.”

JERRY NESMITH



Gembel’s email signature says, “Talent is a gift; character is a choice.” This mentality is a critical part of the hiring process for Atlas Outdoor, he says, and it’s something he’s learned along the way. He is currently hiring for a key sales role in the organization, and he’s using something he learned from Dave Ramsey’s solutions program: He’s interviewing the candidate’s spouse to see what type of support this candidate will have at home.

“I know the importance of a supportive spouse plays on the partner,” he says. “We’re hiring him, but we’re hiring her, too.”

3 FOCUS ON CUSTOMER SERVICE

When it comes to customer service, NeSmith and Gembel look to mimic Chick-fil-A.

“I’m obsessed with Chick-fil-A,” Gembel says. “It’s because of their culture.”

Gembel says the fast-food chain puts an emphasis on the experience. It’s often the person interfacing most with the customer who makes the biggest impression. Gembel says he

empowers employees to make decisions like an owner, that everything — including the cleanliness of trucks and uniforms and interfacing with clients — matters.

“When you’ve got people that are in an entry-level position, think about the power that guy has for your company,” he says. “He is an ambassador for your brand. At Chick-fil-A, they use their front-line people, the ones who are checking you through at the drive-thru, bringing out your beverage, and it’s the same thing with us. A lot of times, the reason a customer will hire us, for, say, a \$100,000 patio, is because they had a great experience with one of our front-line guys.”

NeSmith says looking at the overall Chick-fil-A experience has helped him impart his expectations to his employees. NeSmith uses the hashtag #NeSmithWay to brand the experience his customers can expect from his business.

“I want it to be a clean, easy and well-run business, and if we can do that, I think we can accomplish pretty much what we would like to accomplish,” he says. “(Chick-fil-A) figured out customer service and quality. If you can marry those, you can’t not be successful on some level.”

Tucker says Sugar Hill Outdoors has built its reputation and

growth entirely on word of mouth by ensuring his clients are beyond satisfied with his company’s work. Sugar Hill Outdoors is a design/build company that serves a 70 percent residential, 30 percent commercial clientele. Tucker says his company did about \$4 million in business last year.

“How I’ve built the business and how we expect to get more work is by doing a good job for the homeowner,”



Clint Tucker

Continued on page 16

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Continued from page 15

he says. “Ninety-nine percent of our work is word of mouth. I will not let a homeowner be unhappy. If something’s not right, we’ll tear it out and redo it. The most important thing is to not disappoint a client, to me. They’re my sales force.”

4 DEVELOP THE RIGHT PROCESSES

As a business grows, having easily replicable standard operating procedures (SOPs) in place helps ensure clients will have the same experience with every employee in the company.

“In my mind, when I take a look at a system, it’s a way of doing something,” Bourque says. “The best way is to have a written step-by-step process that anyone can learn, understand and repeat.”

Deemer and Murray have put a lot of time and energy into developing systems and processes.

“Everything, including how we build a standard retaining wall and how the crew receives the resources for that job, can be found on our Google Drive in our systems area,” Deemer says.

Before implementing a new system or process, Deemer and Murray say they work with their team to give it a test run before it becomes an official process. The ultimate goal they have for their business is to develop a SOP for everything Local Roots does. They say this not only has a good effect on how Local Roots is run, but it also shapes the experience their clients have with the company.

“Here’s what it’s like working with Local Roots, and we know you’re going to have the same experience every time,” Deemer says of the benefits of systems to his clients.



ADVICE:

“Don’t just let your business happen to you. You need to happen to it, and you need to make sure you’re doing what is necessary for it to continue.”

PATRICK MURRAY



ADVICE:

“Surround yourself with peers in the industry, and surround yourself with people who can act as mentors. Don’t surround yourself with people in the industry who have different stated goals as you. I’m sure I could learn something from that, but that’s not what I’m going for, and that’s not what I want to do.”

KENNETH DEEMER

Deemer and Murray also see the systems as an important way for them to delegate responsibilities to their team members.

“Having systems and processes so that we could make sure things were being run the way we wanted them run, we could keep company standards and quality standards without being directly involved,” Deemer says.

Continued on page 21



QUALI-PRO



ROOT OF THE PROBLEM

WITH HIS THOROUGH TROUBLESHOOTING PROCESS, IAN RODRIGUEZ, PH.D., OF QUALI-PRO DESCRIBES HOW TO IDENTIFY SOURCES OF COMMON LANDSCAPING PROBLEMS



QUALI-PRO

Finding a smart cure

Some long-term solutions will require more than just chemical approaches.

How to stop common landscape problems in their tracks with a landscape troubleshooting process

What might look like one thing on the surface may be something completely different once the team digs a little deeper. That's why it's imperative lawn care operators (LCOs) and landscape maintenance teams can spot problems, identify the causes and offer solutions. Walking them through that landscape troubleshooting process is Ian Rodriguez, Ph.D., technical services manager, Quali-Pro.

Rodriguez will cover examples of commonly encountered issues, how to figure out what's causing those issues and what to do about them in an upcoming webinar hosted by *Landscape Management* and sponsored by Quali-Pro. Topics will include plant selection/adaptation, climate/weather, soils, water, diseases, insects and weeds.

"You have to address the underlying problem, or it will be a recurring issue down the road that can blow up your margin," says Rodriguez, adding that the solution isn't

always one product or approach. "If it's a constant problem, the customer's perception of you won't be good either, even if you didn't cause it."

Rodriguez developed this landscape troubleshooting process based off of his extensive industry experience and from solving problems on hundreds of commercial landscapes. He worked at an ornamental nursery before studying horticulture at the University of Florida, later earning a master's degree in turfgrass science and a Ph.D. at Clemson University in plant physiology.

He then became an instructor in the golf and landscaping programs at Florida Gateway College in Lake City for eight years before becoming ValleyCrest/BrightView's technical director for the Florida region. In that role, Rodriguez provided technical support and training in agronomy, horticulture and pest control, as well as troubleshooting issues with customers.

Since joining the Quali-Pro team two years ago, Rodriguez

has offered technical support and also manages the research for the development of new products. Quali-Pro manufactures both post-patent and proprietary chemistries, supported by its multinational parent company Adama. Not only does Quali-Pro look to the industry for what needs there might be when developing its unique combination chemistry products, but the brand also has team members like Rodriguez who have been on that side of the industry.

"Of course, we want people to buy and use our products, but we also want to make sure they pick the right ones for the issue at hand and consider additional factors that may be contributing," he says.

Weighing all the factors

Even with good product selection, if site-specific issues are favoring a disease or pest, it may seem that the product was less than effective. The reality may be that the product worked fine, but pressure is unusually strong because of bad conditions.

Some problems are obvious, like if there are noticeable insects chewing the leaves. If a plant turns yellow or begins to decline, though, the root cause might not



Ian Rodriguez

be as apparent.

“There’s a long list of things that could cause that plant not to perform, and a lot of those get overlooked,” Rodriguez says.

The goal is to solve the problem in the most cost-effective way possible for the company and customer. Often, that’s translated to mean finding one fertilizer or pesticide approach that will solve a problem, when in reality, it might take several products and/or approaches to remedy the issue. That’s why it’s important for lawn care and landscape professionals to properly troubleshoot problems.

For example, LCOs must identify weeds to choose the right herbicide and course of action. However, they also need to consider if it’s an indicator weed, which might mean there’s a reason why the weed is always popping up in that area.

Indicator weeds like sedges or dollar weed are often associated with wet soil conditions, which could mean the site has waterlogged soil. Those issues could be caused by an irrigation management problem or poor drainage — things chemicals alone won’t fix.

“You can find herbicides that will control sedge and dollar weed,” he says. “But, if the underlying condition isn’t addressed, you’re always going to have sedge and dollar weed problems.”

When a chemical is the solution, LCOs still need



Sometimes the cause of damage, such as damage from the Sri Lankan weevil (*Myllocerus undecimpustulatus*) is readily apparent.

to consider the landscape’s conditions. If a plant has piercing-sucking insects such as aphids, whitefly or scale, for example, a pyrethroid like Quali-Pro Bifenthrin I/T can be highly effective — if spray coverage is good. That might be easy to achieve with shrubs or small plant material.

However, if there’s a tall hedge or tree where coverage would be difficult or impractical, soil-applied Quali-Pro Imidacloprid 2F would be a better option.

“Both are labeled for control, but the site and specific conditions within it may dictate whether or not both are practical options,” Rodriguez says.

Knowledge matters

Rodriguez has seen almost everything when helping troubleshoot a property: trees planted too deep, plants in the ground still in the pot, trees with

the synthetic sock still on the ball, mulch volcanoes and other instances of sloppy installations.

“You don’t necessarily have to closely inspect every tree, since some symptoms and issues can be spotted from a distance,” Rodriguez says. “You’ll get a feel for common failures over time and some of the basic things to look for.”

Having the knowledge on how to solve lawn and landscape problems is what will help set a company apart.

“If you have horticultural issues going undiagnosed, that’s where your knowledge comes into play and where you will see differences,” he says. “That builds reputation and marketability. You have a better chance of selling that enhancement or corrective renovation if you have good reasoning with good knowledge behind it.” ▲



Rodriguez will cover these topics and more during the landscape troubleshooting webinar Thursday, April 22, at 1 p.m. EDT/ 10 a.m. PDT. Sign up for the free webinar at www.LandscapeManagement.net/Webinars.

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WORKING SMARTER

Equipment such as the Takeuchi TL8 helps the crew at Sugar Hill Outdoors work 10 times faster.

NeSmith way. He says he'll often hear long-time employees correct newer employees on installation by saying "Hey, that ain't going to fly here."

NeSmith says now is a good time to get proper training for yourself and your team. Hardscape North America and suppliers like Techo-Bloc, Belgard and Unilock offer virtual classes and webinars, so there are no excuses for not being educated.

"Everything's at your fingertips now, so why not do it?" NeSmith says.

Continued from page 16

5 EDUCATE YOUR STAFF

Griffin says educating the crew is an absolute must when trying to grow a hardscape business. Prime Lawn's business, which serves primarily residential clientele and offers design/build and irrigation services, has remained steady and grew about 5 percent last year.

"You can't have a foreman who knows everything and a crew who knows nothing," he says. "That's really a key; it's the knowledge. You have to keep your crew updated on new processes. You have to train them."

Griffin and NeSmith say they pull crews together on a rainy or off day to talk about things they've learned.

"We bring out the whiteboard and go over the basics: how you excavate, how you stage a project, how many inches of base material is required under a paver driveway versus a paver walkway," says NeSmith, noting he'll often quiz crew members on what they've learned and then take them out to lunch as a reward.

"(This shows) that knowledge is valued to me and the company," he says.

NeSmith says he spends a lot of time working with his crews to ensure proper installations. He holds Interlocking Concrete Pavement Institute certifications and National Concrete Masonry Association certifications,

and he says he has high expectations for his crews.

"(I spent) more than a year or two of saying 'Hey, you did this wrong, I want you to undo it and do it right,'" he says, adding he is willing to take the hit of an extra day on the site and the extra cost to make sure things are done the

6 USE THE RIGHT EQUIPMENT

"Equipment is a game-changer in hardscapes," Tucker says. "Just to save on the amount of labor it would take to move material from the front of the site to the back and getting areas prepped to do the

Continued on page 22

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Continued from page 21

installation, you can do it 10 times faster with equipment.”

Tucker says a favorite of the Sugar Hill crew is the fleet of three Takeuchi TL8 compact track loaders.

Prime Lawn upgraded a lot of equipment in the past two years, and Griffin says those upgrades have paid big dividends on job sites. He points to a John Deere 204L loader that has helped move materials.

“The efficiency of being able to load instead of doing a (cubic) yard at a time, we can do 3 (cubic) yards at a time,” he says. “That’s five minutes less of loading materials in the trailer at a time. It all adds up quick.”

Prime Lawn also upgraded to 16-foot Big Tex dump trailers and purchased a Toro Dingo compact loader. Another big purchase was the addition of two more Weber MT vibratory rollers for porcelain paver installations.

“We had one before, and we were trying to schedule around that,” he says. “Buying two more allowed us the flexibility of not having to worry about what crew had it when.”

NeSmith says his iQ Power Tools dustless saws are a selling point for clients, especially when working in pool enclosures.

“We’ve invested in the right technology and the right equipment,” he says. “We’re not going to dust up your pool enclosure, and we’re going to clean everything up after ourselves.”

Deemer and Murray see equipment as another motivator to attract good workers.

Local Roots uses what they call an army of mini machines to work in the tight access areas within Pittsburgh city limits. These include Ditch Witch mini skid-steers and a Kubota microexcavator that shrinks down to 28 inches wide. Other favorites are a Canycom compact carrier that rotates and an Engcon tiltrotator that attaches to their excavator.

“All those have been incredible for us in terms of labor savings,” Deemer says. “It leads to a way happier workforce. If you look at the work someone is able to do, we’re two to three times the effectiveness of the employees, just because they’re running the machines.”

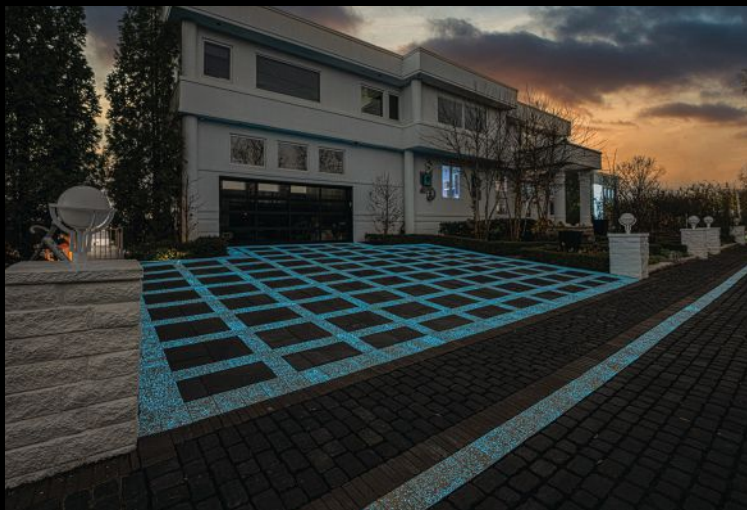
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ADVICE:

“Look at the bidding process and make sure you’re doing upfront accounting. That’s 100 percent of where you make or break your profit. It’s not the end of the job, it’s the beginning, even before you break ground. It’s how you bid for that job. My bids are actually itemized. It tells the client how many pallets they’re getting, how many tons of base material, what type of drainage we’re using, even down to the point of how many 4-inch PVC fittings we might be using on a job.”

MATT GRIFFIN



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Continued from page 22

Additionally, Local Roots noticed that software also has been a big driver of their growth.

"Our use of LMN has truly been a game-changer," he says. "We attribute a lot of our success to that program."

7 KNOW YOUR NUMBERS

Bourque says another big driver of hardscape business growth is having a handle on the financial performance of your business.

"You can love being in the industry, you can love your work, but if you want to be profitable in business long term, it needs to make sense on paper," he says.

Bourque advises companies to know which jobs are profitable and understand why and know key performance indicators such as revenue per man-hour.

"Most companies who fail do so because they don't know their numbers," he says. "The average net profit margin in the landscape and hardscape industry is only 3 percent net profit, and it's only 3 percent because if they were more aware of their numbers, they could correct them quicker. What ends up happening is hardscape contractors are really



HIT THE BOOKS

Certifications and proper training can be a sales tool for clients to see that a business is the right one for the job.

good at doing the work, but they don't spend enough time tracking their numbers."

Bourque encourages hardscape business owners to take a look at the numbers after each job and understand the cost of material, overhead and time spent on the job versus those estimated.

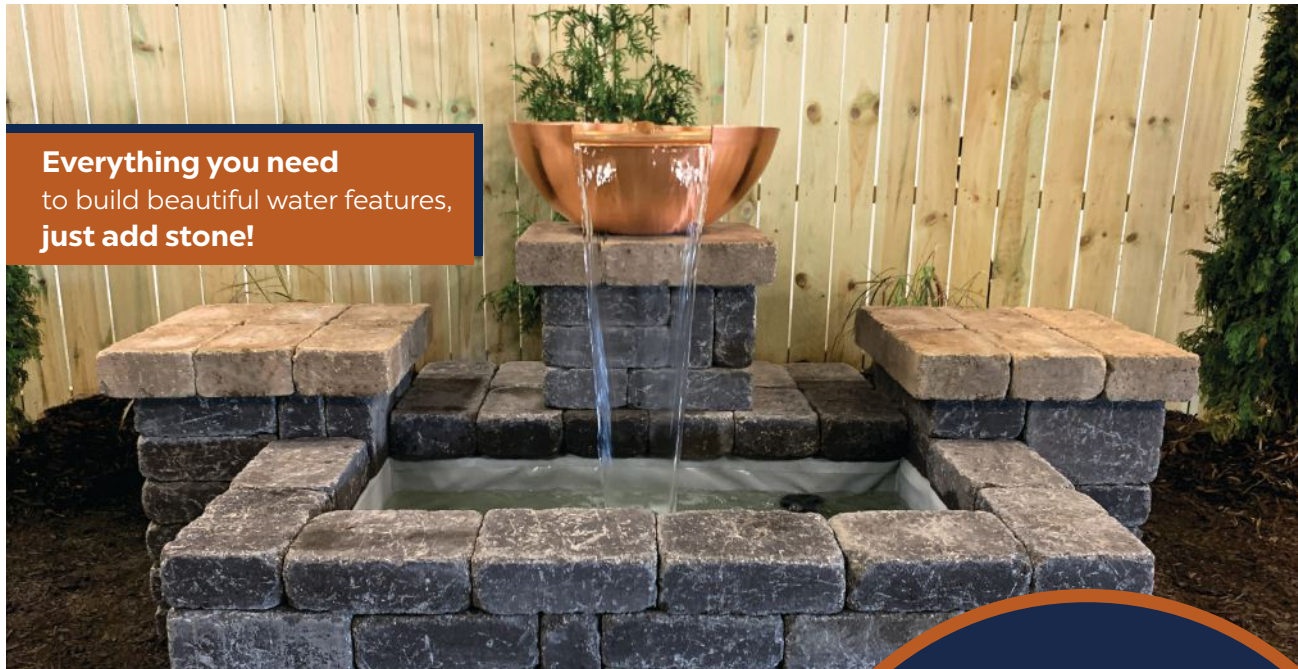
"I see a common mistake of companies thinking that the gross profit margin is the actual company profit," he says. "However, gross profit doesn't account for the company overhead that is usually on average 20 to 30 percent. Only the net profit really counts. When business owners don't realize this, they might end up having very little or no net profit left at the end, although it might still look like there's money left over in the end."

Keeping a close, constant eye on your finances will help refine your business practices to help you grow the net profit of your business.

"Making changes only once a year because you find out you're not profitable is just not enough to run a business," he says. 📖

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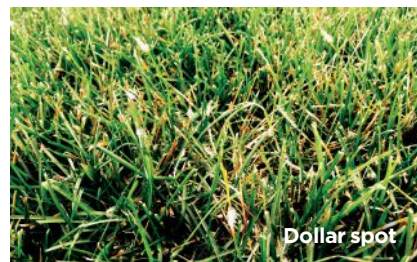
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PROTECT YOUR TURF



Take control

Experts offer recommendations for *Poa annua*, billbug and dollar spot control

Don't wait until spring hits to think about how you plan on tackling weeds, pests and disease in your clients' lawns. Bret Corbett, field research and technical services manager for Prime Source, and Aaron Hathaway, technical field services manager for Nufarm, offer recommendations for fighting some common lawn problems: *Poa annua*, billbugs and dollar spot. With all chemical applications, make sure you follow the product label and PPE guidelines.

Poa annua, or annual bluegrass, is a winter annual weed, meaning that it germinates in the fall. Most of the time, the fall germinations go unnoticed until late winter or early spring. This is due to shorter day length along with colder soil temperatures, which keep the annual bluegrass in a semidormant state after germination.

When the temperatures warm up, *Poa annua* will emerge from dormancy and grow rapidly. When temperatures are colder than normal and snowfall is greater than normal, expect to see high weed pressure in the spring. This leads to the infamous seedhead while it is flowering, which makes it very noticeable in the turf canopy, and it can be seen until the summer. When soil temperatures heat up, *Poa* usually completes its life cycle and dies.

Cultural control: *Poa* thrives in low-mowed, poorly drained compacted soils. Increasing mowing height, reducing compaction and implementing a

proper fertilizer program can decrease annual bluegrass pressure.

Chemical control: A dithiopyr pre-emergent can be applied late July/early August but would need to be applied each season for better control. For post-emergent control, amicarbazone can be applied on Kentucky bluegrass and is best used in the spring or fall season, with two to three applications in one season 14-21 days apart. Plant growth regulators like prohexadione calcium are also an option to regulate *Poa* growth. For warm-season applications in dormant turf, glufosinate can provide adequate control without causing delays in green-up. Glufosinate can be tank mixed with preemergent herbicides such as prodiamine to provide control of summer annual weeds.

Billbugs are dark charcoal or black insects that are 0.3-0.4 inch in length. They can be found in many different parts of the country and vary in species including hunting billbugs and bluegrass billbugs. They typically overwinter as adults in leaf litter, mulch and thatch.

They emerge in the spring when soil temperatures increase. Since these insects are in a state of suspended development (diapause) during the winter and burrowed into the turf, snowfall and colder temperatures usually have no effect on these insects. However, if cold temperatures persist, it could delay when the insect emerges as the soil temperature has to reach 55 degrees F.

Cultural control: Maintain healthy turf and observe proper fertilization


timings and mowing. Other options would be to use less desirable turf types to the insect, such as perennial ryegrass or resistant varieties of bermudagrass or zoysiagrass.

Chemical control: Determine the stage of the insect's development by using a pitfall trap to catch and assess the insect. It's important to have an insecticide in the turf in May or late May before the eggs hatch and the larvae start to feed. Clothianidin and pyrethroid insecticides such as bifenthrin, lambda-cyhalothrin or imidacloprid are the recommended chemistries.

Dollar spot disease can be found in almost every species of turfgrass and presents as spots on the turf approximately the size of a dollar coin (hence the name). The spots are white to light tan in color and can range from 0.5 to 6 inches in diameter. The lesions will begin to appear when night temperatures exceed 50 degrees F. In addition to warmer soil temperatures, the pathogen requires 10 hours of continuous leaf wetness.

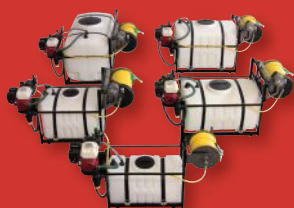
Nutrient-deficient turf is more susceptible to dollar spot; however, the disease can also be observed more in stressed situations such as drought or excessive thatch.

Cultural control: Maintain proper nutrient programs, use plant disease-resistant cultivars, increase mowing heights and remove wet leaves.

Chemical control: Azoxystrobin in combination with propiconazole is the most recommended chemistry and provides good to excellent control of dollar spot. Metconazole is another broad-spectrum fungicide that provides good control. Early action is key — once you begin to see spots, make an application. 



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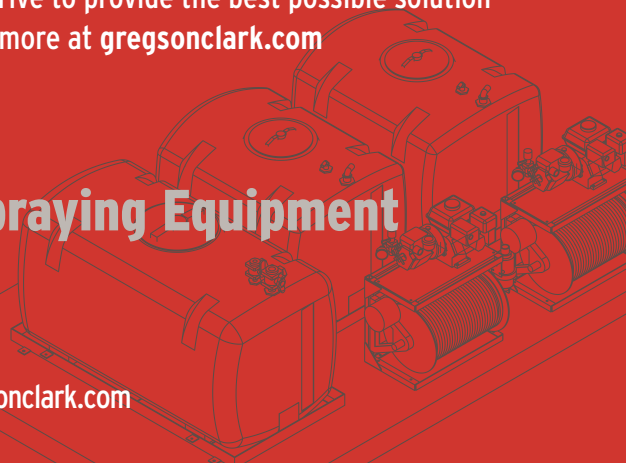


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DID YOU KNOW

What's in a spray setup?

A look at lawn care operators' custom-built spray setups BY SARAH WEBB | LM MANAGING EDITOR

When choosing a spray rig setup, there are several factors that should flow into the final decision.

"It is important to understand that the investment goes beyond the vehicle," says Ryan Petitti, director of technical and quality assurance at Green Lawn Fertilizing in West Chester, Pa. "While initially difficult to quantify, the impact on weed control and reduction on service calls will provide a return on investment over time."

Petitti and Jared Icard, owner of Roots Turf and Ornamental in Bonaire, Ga., share what factors should come into play when selecting a spray setup.

EFFICIENCY WINS OUT

For Roots Turf and Ornamental, a lawn care operation serving a mostly residential clientele, efficiency comes to mind first.

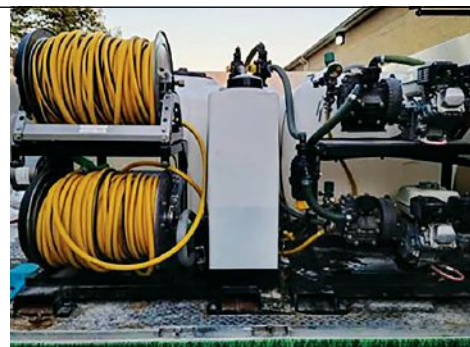
The company uses Graham Spray Equipment's open flatbed trucks with the spray tanks on the back. So far, it

has 10 spray rigs in its operation, with a few more in the works.

"Out of these trucks, if we come to your property and need to spray trees and shrubs, we've got it set up for that," Icard says. "We can do everything out of one truck, and we're not having to backtrack on routes or send multiple technicians out. One technician can do it all."

Icard points to the trucks' ability to maneuver in and out of residential neighborhoods and ease of maintenance as other time-saving factors.

Green Lawn Fertilizing's spray setups were also designed with efficiency in mind. The company provides lawn



PHOTOS: GREEN LAWN FERTILIZING



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← THREE IN ONE
Green Lawn Fertilizing's spray trucks are equipped with three tanks totaling 600 gallons of capacity.

care, ornamental and pest services to a mostly residential clientele.

The company's spray systems are configured with the ability to carry multiple mixture combinations at any given time and are comprised of three tanks totaling 600 gallons of carrying capacity: a 300-, 200- and 100-gallon tank.

The spray system is outfitted with two electric reels, each equipped with a 300-foot, 0.5-inch hose. The top reel pulls from the 300-gallon tank, while the bottom reel can pull from the 200- or 100-gallon tank. The company uses a Lesco spray gun calibrated at 2 gallons per minute. An electric start Honda

GX160 engine powers the spray system.

"We were inspired by a single focus: maximizing service results for our customers," Petitti says.

The setup allows crews to mix multiple product combinations, Petitti adds, which has reduced the number of passes over the lawn because technicians can apply fertilizer, weed control and surface/sub-surface insect control in a single pass.


He notes that using liquid has also improved technicians' ability to service challenging areas, such as hills, curb strips, parking lot islands and turf around landscape obstacles.

"From a safety perspective, we have reduced physical strain due to the decreased need of loading and unloading bags of granular from our vehicles as well as reducing the handling of concentrates," Petitti says.

ADVICE FOR FELLOW LCOs

For LCOs looking into new spray rigs, Petitti recommends performing an impact analysis on labor and efficiency, including a time analysis of individual services on different sized properties; a square footage analysis to determine the best treatment method (spreader-sprayer method such as a Z-Spray or a spray truck method); and a cost analysis of a granular program versus a liquid program.

Finally, Petitti says it's helpful to involve seasoned technicians to provide input on vehicle configurations. It's also a good idea to build a single vehicle first and put it into service for a couple months before scaling the model.

"This permits the ability to make modifications for improvement," he says. 



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"I use primarily granular products and prefer to use only custom products that I work with my distributor partners to design. While there are some good options off the shelf, being able to deliver exactly what I want for macro and micronutrients, biological supplements and other amendments is key to providing premium results. Many of my core fertilizer products are at least a 2:0:1 ratio of N-P-K, with some being 1:0:1. They also all include soil-building supplements to build and maintain soil biology without necessarily having a separate 'supplement' program. In addition to using a premium controlled-release, polycoatings provide the elite results I expect out of my programs."



RYAN EVILSIZOR
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"We have taken many soil samples around the state we service and customize plans based on those results. We do six applications a year, and, depending on the application timing, we will add potassium, humic acid, micronutrients, iron, phosphate, calcium and lime. We also use a Class A granular biosolid fertilizer as our base. We start the season with a crabgrass preemergent with fertilizer and potassium to give our lawns a nice green color coming out of winter dormancy. From there, we go with a slow-release fertilizer with different nutrients depending on what temperatures we are applying in. We also apply our fertilizer with grub and surface insect control and potassium during the summer to prevent any damage that can occur. In some cases, we will need to add soil amendments."



KERRY BENNETT
OWNER
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"I use a 30-0-0 liquid fertilizer; I use that with 50 percent slow-release nitrogen because I do four applications in a year. The idea being the 50 percent slow-release keeps yards more even in color and growth instead of the spiking highs and lows of all fast-release nitrogen. It's a lot better for the environment. By running all liquids, I can change my mixtures of fertilizer and micronutrients and iron to each specific area. In the areas with sandy soil and irrigation, you only have so much time for the roots to grab the fertilizer before irrigation can push the fertilizer past the root system, and it is a waste of money and product. With the slow-release fertilizer, it is absorbed better, and I have seen much better long-term results."

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BUSINESS BOOSTERS

Minimize, maximize water

How two lawn care companies are utilizing wetting agents to win customers

BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Last summer, the agronomists at Lawns Unlimited in Milton, Del., excitedly observed how well the company's new summer lawn care program was performing. The region was dry at the time, and based on the sandy soils of the region, many lawns were showing signs of fatigue. Yet, their customers' lawns were outperforming their neighbors' lawns — their grass was greener.

The secret to their success? Lawns Unlimited's commitment to adding a wetting agent to overcome the bicarbonate layer in the soil it battles year in, year out.

"You could almost see the lawn turn green overnight, just by applying the material," says Ed Fleming, owner and president of the company. "I was always curious about using some type of soil hydrate training agent because of the fact that we have very sandy soils."

Landscape Management discussed wetting agent success stories with Lawns Unlimited in Delaware and BioLawn in Minnesota's Twin Cities, as well as product experts with the Plant Food Co. and WinField United.

FOCUSED ON QUALITY

Founded in 1986, Lawns Unlimited is a full-service operation focusing on lawn care for residential clients. The company also offers irrigation installation, irrigation upgrades, well drilling and mosquito control.

The company is led by Fleming and Travis Pitts. Both have degrees in agronomy and environmental science from Delaware Valley College, which they put to good use when creating plans for their customers. The company prides itself on being beneficial for yards and beneficial for the environment. Last year, the company began including Hydration A-Plus plant and soil hydrating agent and bicarbonate reducer from the Plant Food Co. in its program. The visual results, as well as the water savings, were immediately noticeable.

"We don't want to over-water, and we don't want to underwater," Pitts says. "We want to maximize the water that's going on the lawn so that it retains as much as possible. It's more

about saving water for our clients and the environment. Minimize the water, maximize its use."

Fleming says he and Pitts have used other wetting agents in the past on a case-by-case basis. In 2020, they included Hydration A-Plus in their total turf package and blanketed all their yards with the product.

"It's an extra added cost, but we are more focused on quality of product, which makes our lawns look better than our competition's," Fleming says. "It breaks the bicarbonate layer ... it's just a barrier. Once you break that layer, it allows the material to go into the soil and helps free up the calcium. That's what makes the turf green up overnight."

SUPPLEMENTING TURF PROGRAMS

BioLawn, in the Twin Cities, is a residential lawn care company. Will Haselbauer, the owner, has been running the company for five years, but his experience with turf goes back to his undergraduate

Continued on page 34



Will Haselbauer

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– Jamie Hageman, Manager, GreenLawn



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BUSINESS BOOSTERS

Continued from page 32

days at the University of Minnesota and obtaining his masters at the University of Tennessee in plant science. At Tennessee, he studied sports turf, including how to get a football field to recover quickly from the many stresses imparted on the turf: both environmental stresses like drought and disease pressure and the stresses of a 300-pound offensive lineman's cleats.

"I'm familiar with supplementing turf programs with a lot of things," Haselbauer says. "The wetting agent is a product we know helps bridge the gap of a summer drought and helps on both irrigated and nonirrigated lawns. Reducing water inputs and needs on both as well as keeping the lawn looking better."

“Combine a couple things together, where you know, during the heat stress of the summer, you’re going to get the benefit from one of these two or three things.”

—AARON JOHNSEN



BioLawn's goals are to use environmentally sound practices and safer products for both its customers and its technicians, Haselbauer says. The wetting agent BioLawn has relied on for the past few seasons is Synergy from Aquatrols. It's a step in the company's lawn care package, something the team tries to sell to every customer.

"You get that summer decline in a lawn, and the customer isn't happy.

If we can sell them this application to prevent that, it's easier for us," he says. "It's funny, you get worried about adding an extra service or increasing the cost of a package, but most people don't care; they just want you to take care of their lawn. The conversation of, 'Why are you doing this extra application?' is way easier than the conversation, 'Why does my lawn look horrible?'"

Continued on page 36

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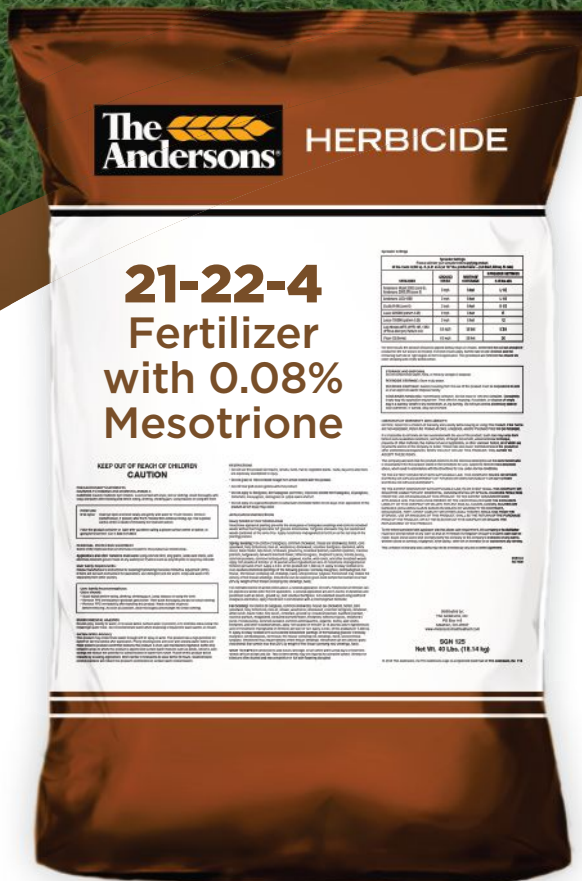
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BUSINESS BOOSTERS

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A PROGRESSIVE APPROACH

Aaron Johnsen, director of sales, professional products, for WinField United, says the lawn care industry isn't close to utilizing wetting agents to their full potential because the results are sometimes hard to see for both the customer and the lawn care company.

"You sell a weed control, and someone sees the weeds die. You sell a fertilizer, and you see the lawn green up," Johnsen says. "Wetting agents, you put it down today, and you don't know if you're going to get the weather to show the benefit."

Johnsen believes that someday wetting agents will be as big in the lawn care industry as they are in the golf maintenance industry. He says progressive

companies, like Lawns Unlimited and BioLawn, are showing how wetting agents offer a company the opportunity to stand out. He suggests a company first try a wetting agent in its program by selling it as an add-on service.

"Sell a summer stress turf application and combine more than a wetting agent in there," he says. "Combine a couple things together, where you know, during the heat stress of the summer, you're going to get a benefit from one of these two or three things. This helps your lawn get through the stress of the summer. Your cost is covered in that additional revenue in that service."

Tom Weinert, vice president of sales, the Plant Food Co., says he believes




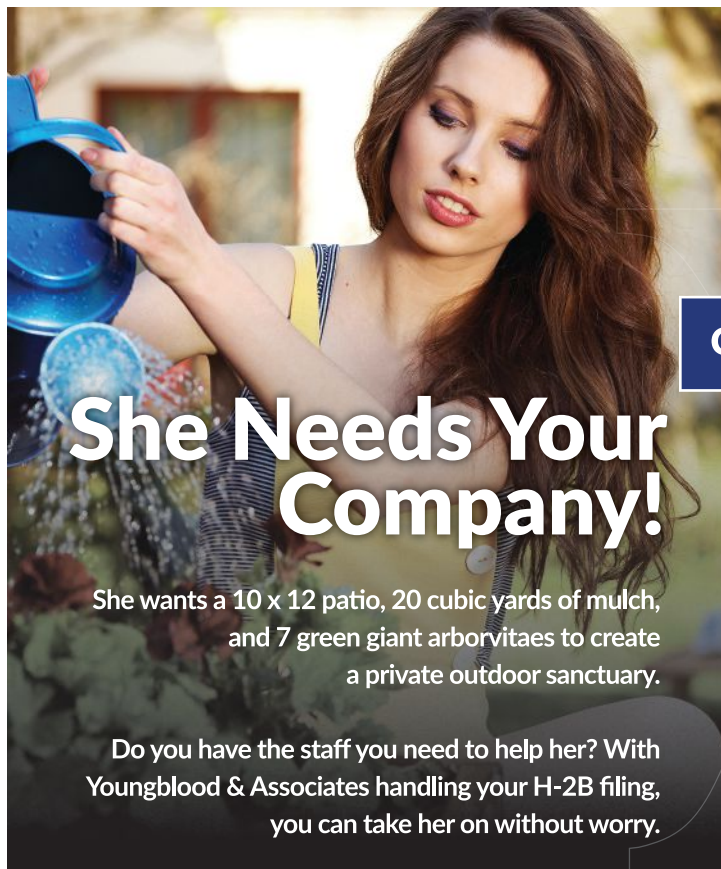
Tom Weinert

wetting agents are getting on the radar of lawn care companies because of how they help yards respond to stress; how they help grass recover quicker; and the reduction in water. Also important to the adoption of

Hydration A-Plus, he says, is that lawn care companies don't need to water it in.

Weinert suggests lawn care companies take that first step by dedicating one truck with a smaller route, for one day, to doing applications.

"The biggest impact is when the guys or gals on that route come back after a week or two and say, 'Why are those lawns so much better than my other ones?'" he says. "Also, try it on the owner's yard to see what they say." 



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NaturaLawn® of America is the only national lawn care company of its kind. Since 1987, we've been offering an alternative to harsh chemicals and pesticides through our proprietary, natural and organic-based fertilizers and biological controls. By providing customers with a safer and environmentally pet- and family-friendly lawn care experience, our franchisees have a distinct competitive advantage over traditional lawn care companies. And, we're now serving more than 115,000 customers in 26 states and Washington D.C.

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Due to the seasonality of the business, timelines are very important when opening a NaturaLawn of America franchise. If our franchise opportunity appeals to you, I encourage you to respond promptly to learn more about this unique opportunity. New owners training starts mid-September.

I welcome your questions and am here to be of service to you. Please call or email me today!

Blaine R. Young

VP of Franchise and Business Development, NaturaLawn of America
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From left:
Blaine R. Young,
Vice President
of Franchise
and Business
Development;
Phil Catron,
Founder and
President





From left: Jesse Catron, Senior Vice President; Theresa Smith, Senior Vice President; Phil Catron, Founder and President

The powerhouse of the green industry

Phil Catron has spent the better half of his life working in the turfgrass world. After graduating with a degree in agronomy from the University of Delaware, he completed his graduate work in soil and plant science at Rutgers.

Catron bootstrapped his way into a world of lawn care not quite explored or accepted by the industry at the time.

“It was such an interesting concept that I figured — if it has any legs to it — then OK, I will have to do it myself,” he says. In 1987, NaturaLawn of America was the first to coin and use the term “organic based.” With NaturaLawn’s proprietary products, Catron found a way to provide services with fewer cancellations and better results.

“Our average customer has been with us eight years,” he says, adding that NaturaLawn’s cancellation

rate is around 15 percent and that some larger lawn care companies see cancellations above 30 percent.

NaturaLawn of America, which grew more than 13 percent in 2020, continues to be the powerhouse of the green industry. All indications

show the company is poised for a very strong 2021 fiscal year and it has now awarded two additional franchise licenses so far: one in Mississippi and one in New Hampshire.

Sales revenue is estimated to exceed 85 million. In this special supplement, you’ll learn about a handful of the many successful franchisees, along with the growth some have seen with the company’s Mosquito Ranger and Tick Ranger brands.

The future is bright and strong for the NaturaLawn of America franchisee family.



From customer to franchisee John Bunt, New Canaan, Conn.

REVENUE: \$1.1 million

CUSTOMERS: 1,500

EMPLOYEES: 11

SERVICES: Lawn care, aeration and seeding, and flea and tick control

YEARS AS A FRANCHISEE: 5

LICENSES: 2

When John Bunt first heard about NaturaLawn of America in 2009, he wasn't looking for a franchise to buy. Instead, he was looking for a lawn care service for his own home. Because he wanted something that was organic based, NaturaLawn was the perfect fit.

"I liked the fact that the product was organic based and pet-friendly way before it was trendy," Bunt says.

As Bunt continued to receive service from NaturaLawn of America, he decided to leave his corporate job and pursue

something different. When he was given the opportunity to buy a franchise in New Canaan, Conn., he was excited to be working with technicians and managers who had been in the business for years.

"I was very fortunate to find that when I purchased this franchise, the general manager who had been running the franchise had been there for more than 15 years," Bunt says. "Someone with that experience made it very easy to run this business."

After Bunt experienced the business firsthand for a year and a half, he was even more impressed with the products and resources available at NaturaLawn.

"I think it's somewhat unique that the NaturaLawn team placed tremendous focus on creating high-quality proprietary products, and those products deliver great results," Bunt says. "Tick Ranger — the

brand we use for our tick control customers — was

actually envisioned out of this franchise about 25 years ago. We have people who are very sensitive to Lyme disease and tick bites in this area, so prevention is needed."

For Bunt, Tick Ranger is responsible for more than half of his business, and it gives him the opportunity to sell more organic-based services.

With customers coming to his franchise for both tick services and lawn care, Bunt continues to use the same care that brought him to NaturaLawn 12 years ago.

"The fertilizers and tick products are designed to follow the organic-based approach," he says. "That's what originally attracted me as a customer and why I wanted to become an owner."



John Bunt

A natural approach for a profitable business John & April Cannon, Charlotte, N.C.

REVENUE: \$1.15 million

CUSTOMERS: 1,666

EMPLOYEES: 9

SERVICES: Lawn Care, aeration and seeding, flea and tick control, and mosquito control

YEARS AS A FRANCHISEE: 17

LICENSES: 2

John and April Cannon originally didn't work in the lawn care industry. John came from the tech industry, and his wife, April, worked for the Addison Airport in Dallas prior to buying their NaturaLawn of America franchise. Seventeen years ago, they decided they wanted to own a company, but weren't sure which industry to buy into.

"When I was researching franchises, I found that lawn care was one of the few industries where you could run a multimillion-dollar franchise business out of a single location," says John

Cannon. "I didn't want to own and manage 10 or 15 separate franchises with 10 or 15 managers reporting to me."

As they continued researching, John Cannon investigated the future of the lawn care industry. He found there were not many options at that time for organic products, as the industry was extremely slow to adopt a more organic approach for the safety of families and pets.

"I felt the future of lawn care would, over time, move to a more environmental approach," says John Cannon. "When I found that NaturaLawn was a lawn care company that was already going that way, I thought it was a good bet to get into a business whose ideals mirrored that at the beginning. There really was no other franchise that offered this type of service."

With a large majority of their customers owning pets, almost 75 percent according to John, the Cannons



April and John Cannon

realized that offering pet-friendly services would only help their business and began using NaturaLawn's organic flea,

tick and mosquito services for these clients. Within the first year of offering these products, John and April Cannon saw a 68 percent revenue growth in addition to their regular services.

"These organic products really make a difference for our franchise," John Cannon says. "The first year we offered the flea and tick program, we increased revenue by \$50,000, and business has only picked up since then."

Since the start of 2021, the Cannons have been developing their business plan for the spring, summer and fall months, centering mainly around the organic side of business.

"2021 will be the second year we heavily market the flea, tick and mosquito treatments," he says. "Our big push for this year is marketing the all-natural side of these products."

A natural approach to the residential sector

Todd Courtney, Waukesha, Wis.

REVENUE: \$860,000

CUSTOMERS: 1,820

EMPLOYEES: 9

SERVICES: Lawn care, aeration and seeding, and mosquito control

YEARS AS A FRANCHISEE: 3

LICENSES: 2

Todd Courtney has built multiple companies in the residential sector since 1997. After selling his second company, he knew he wanted to buy an established company but did not want to stray away from residential services. He came across a local NaturaLawn of America franchise that was for sale and, after researching the all-organic base that has made NaturaLawn unique, decided it was the best business venture to pursue.

"I have always been interested in how to treat lawns with less chemicals,"

Courtney says. "I was looking for that for my own lawn, and I found it difficult to locate in this market area. NaturaLawn just checked off all the boxes for me."

Courtney quickly realized he had made the right decision buying a NaturaLawn franchise. With the spring season already in full swing, NaturaLawn offered him the support he needed to succeed while also allowing him to take the reins of his business.

"I bought the company, and we closed on the transaction in April of 2018, and NaturaLawn supported me from the get-go," says Courtney. "They let me get going, and I jumped right into things. We didn't have a lot of time for formal training in year one because I bought the franchise

right before the season started.

The corporate office was there whenever we needed anything."

As Courtney's franchise grew, he found that even if customers would leave, they always came back claiming that NaturaLawn was able to outshine what company they had gone to.

"I truly believe we have the best fertilization there is. You look at the organic foundation, NaturaLawn's commitment to constantly being on the cutting edge of product development within the fertilization sector, and you look at the results we have on our lawns — you just see the difference," Courtney says. "We bought this company three years ago and are thrilled to be a part of the NaturaLawn family today."



Todd Courtney

How one Colorado franchise helps families enjoy the outdoors

Steve & Kevin Deits, Denver

REVENUE: \$875,000

CUSTOMERS: More than 1,700

EMPLOYEES: 9

SERVICES: Lawn care and aeration and seeding

YEARS AS A FRANCHISEE: 18

LICENSES: 3

Eighteen years ago, Steve Deits invested in a NaturaLawn of America franchise. He was looking for a business which would not only benefit his immediate family, but also families all over Colorado. Deits came from a finance background and when he heard of a NaturaLawn franchise being sold, he knew this would be a great way for him to get into the lawn care industry — and help others too.

"When I bought it, the people who were selling it were selling for the right reasons," Deits says. "I could understand the business, and I liked the support I got from NaturaLawn of America as a franchisee."

When Deits began his time as a franchise owner, he discovered the

NaturaLawn name was relatively new to the Denver area, but the ideologies that come with being a NaturaLawn franchisee were in line with the way people in Denver choose to live — spending time enjoying the outdoors as a family.

"People are very health conscious in Colorado, so when they research lawn care, they're looking for safer and organic lawn care — something that can be safe for their families and pets," says Kevin Deits, Steve Deits' son and general manager of the NaturaLawn franchise.

NaturaLawn offers each franchise owner specially formulated fertilizer that will not only be great for the lawns, but that will also be safe for families and pets to spend time around.

"In Denver, we have a different pH than in most places in the country. Because Colorado has such a high pH, we need a fertilizer that is specifically formulated for this soil, and



Steve Deits



Kevin Deits

NaturaLawn has exactly that," Steve Deits says. "The products we use are getting safer all the time. We don't use harsh chemicals in our custom approach, which is an additional selling point to our customers. It differentiates us."

It isn't only the fertilizer that sets NaturaLawn apart. With a family-oriented model, Steve and Kevin Deits are able to hire people who are focused on helping others, treating all customers like family.

"We pride ourselves on the people we hire," Steve Deits says. "People who work well together and who are very considerate and understanding to customers. We get lots of comments about how nice our people are, which is a huge bonus for us."

Building a family in the lawn care business

David & Gayle Donnelly, Monmouth, N.J.

REVENUE: 2.2 million

CUSTOMERS: 3,100

EMPLOYEES: 20

SERVICES: Lawn care, aeration and seeding, flea and tick control, tree and shrub service

YEARS AS A FRANCHISEE: 23

LICENSES: 3

When David Donnelly began his career as a franchise owner with NaturaLawn of America, he was impressed with the support that was offered him.

“Initially, I had no background in the lawn care industry at all,” says Donnelly, whose background was in financial planning. “I needed and received excellent support on just about a daily basis from NaturaLawn.”

As Donnelly’s career with NaturaLawn took off, he would frequently talk to the corporate office

and other franchise owners, swapping industry tips and tricks they had learned along the way. He soon found they became like an extended family to him.

Not only have the other owners become an asset, but over the last 23 years, he’s built his own company to have the same ideals as the main NaturaLawn model.

“I’ve been really lucky here; I’ve been able to build a really good team of people,” Donnelly says. “Not just the technicians who are out in the world doing the work, but we also have a top-notch office staff. Everyone here seems to know how to convey our organic-based approach to customers and potential customers. I’m really lucky to have this group of people.”

Donnelly feels strongly about the environmental approach to lawn care, even if that can at times be more costly than using fully synthetic fertilizers.



Gayle and David Donnelly

According to Donnelly, the way around paying exorbitant prices is to have a quality purchasing department, like the one at NaturaLawn headquarters.

“What stands out to me now is the pricing we enjoy from the purchasing department; it really helps our bottom line a lot and saves customers money,” Donnelly says. “They negotiate advantage pricing on the products we use on the lawns and trees and shrubs.”

The support Donnelly has been given over the years has allowed his franchise to thrive in Monmouth, N.J. Between his own staff and the other NaturaLawn franchise owners, Donnelly built the foundation to grow his business.

Providing the lawn perfection of his childhood nostalgia

Darrin Hewartson, Leesburg, Va.

REVENUE: \$1,115,000

CUSTOMERS: 2,000

EMPLOYEES: 10

SERVICES: Lawn care, aeration and seeding, and flea and tick control

YEARS AS A FRANCHISEE: 8

LICENSES: 2

Darrin Hewartson always knew he wanted to work outdoors. After graduating, he began working for a pest control company, but he didn’t feel excited about his work. He found that his passion was more closely aligned with the lawn care industry.

“I grew up on a 150-acre farm, and my dad was always into how the lawn looked. He really liked a green lawn that was weed free,” Hewartson says. “From the time I was a little kid, we used to mow about 40 acres of pasture, and he’d keep 3 acres always

looking great; he was all about lawns really.”

Hewartson took a job with a local lawn care company but wanted a lawn care company with a different approach. He decided one day to go into the local NaturaLawn of America franchise facility to see if they were hiring. Instead of a job, he was presented with the opportunity to buy a franchise. After about nine months of working for another franchise, Hewartson knew he wanted to own his own.

When first growing his franchise, he relied heavily on the marketing and buying teams at NaturaLawn to help establish his brand in Leesburg, Va. Thanks to that marketing, he was able to better market his Tick Ranger program, which currently has more than 500 customers.

“I don’t need to try to create a new wheel every time I need to market or promote something,” Hewartson says.

“We have a marketing team at NaturaLawn, and we just let them know what

we need. This saves us so much time. It really gives us a competitive edge, and our programs keep growing year after year.”

Hewartson has found that, even with recent legal limits to the levels of nitrogen used for lawn care services in Virginia, his customers all have green, full yards. This he attributes fully to the fertilizers that NaturaLawn produces.

“Over the last few years, the state of Virginia has limited the amount of nitrogen you can put down,” Hewartson says. “Even with the reduction, our lawns are still looking fantastic. I correlate that to adding the organic matter that’s in our fertilizer. Many of the organics we are putting down give us a really pretty looking lawn for our customers.”



Darrin Hewartson

From father to son: A second-generation franchisee Bo Siegman, Oklahoma City

REVENUE: \$350,000

CUSTOMERS: 550

EMPLOYEES: 2

SERVICES: Lawn care, aeration and seeding, flea and tick control, and mosquito control

YEARS AS A FRANCHISEE: 10

LICENSES: 1

In 2001, Bo Siegman's father retired from the oil and gas industry, but he wanted to find another career to fill his time. As Siegman's father continued looking into new industries to work in, the family dogs became sick from the chemicals their current lawn company was using. In addition to the dogs being sick, Siegman's stepmother was undergoing chemotherapy, and they decided it was time to find an environmentally friendly lawn care company. When Siegman's father learned of the

NaturaLawn of America franchise system, he knew he wanted to become a part of it. Siegman himself began working as a technician for his father's newly acquired company.

In 2010, his father retired and passed the business on to Siegman. As he took over running the business, Siegman became aware of how fortunate they were to be a part of the NaturaLawn system. With the backing of the regional manager and the office staff, he was given the support he needed to stand out.

"Our regional manager is always available. I can call or text him, and he generally comes to visit two or three times a year to go over changes or provide any support I might need," Siegman says. "In the last few years, they started a sales team at the home office that helps you set up new sales and follow up with possible leads.

They just want to help you grow your business."

As Siegman learned the ins and outs of running the franchise, he realized that people in his territory were beginning to care more and more about what they were using in their lawns, just as his father had discovered. He has been able to market the natural fertilizers with the help of the NaturaLawn office staff, which gave his franchise a competitive edge.

"All of our fertilizers are proprietary and made specifically for our company in each region," Siegman says. "In Oklahoma, we have Bermudagrass. The NaturaLawn team researches and designs the right kind and amount of material we need, as well as all the other supplements needed for our specific region. That definitely gives us an advantage."



Bo Siegman

A family business safe for the family dogs Dave & David McCulloch, Louisville, Ky.

REVENUE: \$350,000

CUSTOMERS: 445

EMPLOYEES: 3

SERVICES: Lawn care, aeration and seeding, flea and tick control, and mosquito control

YEARS AS A FRANCHISEE: 4

LICENSES: 1

After 25 years in the industrial packaging industry, Dave McCulloch was ready for a change. He began to investigate different franchise opportunities but couldn't find anything that really stuck out to him. Around the same time, McCulloch's wife approached him about some concerns she had around their lawn care company and the chemicals being used.

"My wife was into dog rescue, and we had several animals on our property," McCulloch says. "She began to be concerned about

the lawn care service we were using and the chemicals they were covering our yard with. While that conversation was going on in my house, I found NaturaLawn. It piqued my interest, so I contacted the company."

Following McCulloch's meeting with NaturaLawn, he felt confident about using NaturaLawn products on his own lawn, but didn't quite feel ready to own his own franchise. His son had just graduated from college with a business management degree and was considering going into the lawn care industry. McCulloch showed him the NaturaLawn franchise model, and they scheduled a visit to explore the ownership and operation of a franchise. That was in 2016, and by 2017, McCulloch and his son David became premiere franchisee owners in central Kentucky.

"We use these products on our lawn with our five dogs," McCulloch says.

"We've experienced nothing but great results. The nutrients in the biomass materials in the fertilizer feed the lawn continuously without being harmful to the family or pets."

As they enter into the fifth year as a franchise, McCulloch says they are continuing to build the company and keep it structured, resulting in exponential growth over the years.

"We worked very hard to get the structure in place, and it definitely shows," McCulloch says. "We had a great year in 2020 even with the COVID-19 pandemic. We experienced substantial growth both in customers and in revenue."



Dave McCulloch

From long-time employee to franchisee Jim Laramée, North Attleboro, Mass.

REVENUE: \$9,000,000

CUSTOMERS: 11,780

EMPLOYEES: 92

SERVICES: Lawn care, aeration and seeding, flea and tick control, and mosquito control

YEARS AS A FRANCHISEE: 9

LICENSES: 9

Jim Laramée's career in lawn care began immediately after he graduated from high school. After performing some research, Laramée realized he wanted to work with organic lawn care products, as he felt this was the way all lawn care should be heading.

"Back in 1992, when I started, NaturaLawn of America was kind of up-and-coming with the organic based lawn care approach, and I knew that was going to be the way of the future," Laramée says.

After buying the franchise, Laramée knew he had a lot to learn about the

lawn care industry, including how to run a successful company. NaturaLawn provided Laramée with the tools and training he needed to get his team off the ground and begin working.

"The support was there, the sales strategies were there and the operational procedures were there," Laramée says. "We felt like we were going to need support starting out if we were going to succeed, and they provided that."

As Laramée continued to build his business, he knew he wanted to set his company even further apart. He began offering NaturaLawn's Mosquito Ranger services to keep mosquitos at bay in 2007 and very quickly developed an entire mosquito program for his customers. What started as an add-on for his franchise's current customers took off, and, according to Laramée, is now used by franchise owners across the country.

"The majority of the products we offer are organic based, including the pure

granular fertilizer — that isn't mixed with anything

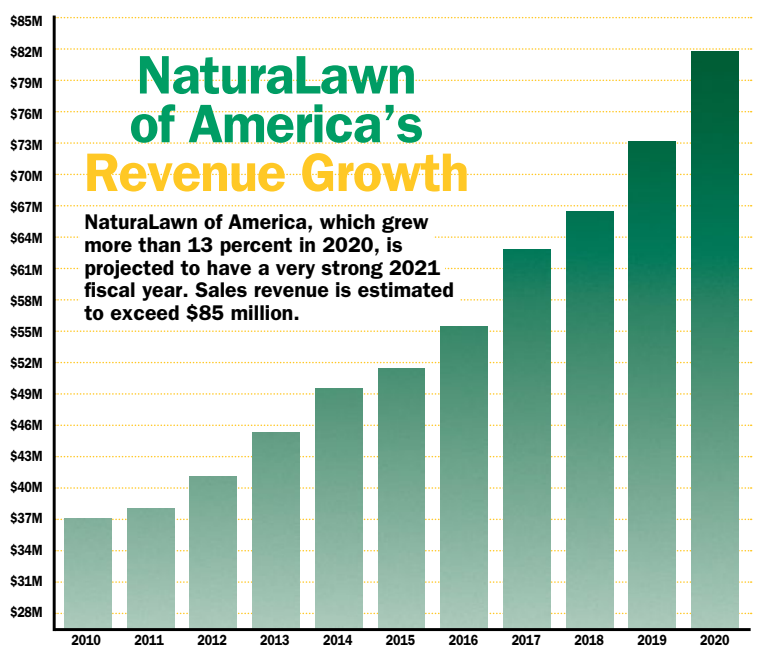
else," Laramée says. "The NaturaLawn system is reducing our pesticide usage by 85-91 percent. The way we are able to do that is by not using combined products on the lawn for every application, further protecting the family."

Laramée is dedicated to offering the people of Massachusetts the same standard of lawn care that made him choose NaturaLawn in the first place. He operates on a curative approach to lawn care rather than preventive, which gives his customers a peace of mind when it comes to their pets and children playing in the yard.

"We want to provide good service, we want to get great results, and we want to retain our customers," Laramée says. "That's always been our focus. Anyone can maintain a company, but it's maintaining the customers that matter."



Jim
Laramée



HOW T+O SOLUTIONS WORK

FAQs on PGRs

Two experts share how plant growth regulator use benefits turf and ornamental care companies

BY SARAH WEBB | LM MANAGING EDITOR



We talked with Aaron Hathaway, technical services manager for Nufarm, and Josh Weaver, Ph.D., director of research and horticulture at Greene County Fertilizer Co., about plant growth regulators (PGRs) and how they can be a boon for lawn care businesses.

Q: HOW CAN PLANT GROWTH REGULATORS (PGRs) BE USED TO MANAGE TREE AND SHRUB GROWTH?

AH: Most PGRs used on trees and shrubs are gibberellic acid (GA) inhibitors, which is a hormone that causes cell elongation. This inhibition doesn't stop growth altogether, but it helps limit the elongation of cells, which can result in energy that would have been spent in that cell elongation to be used elsewhere in the plant. This energy can be partitioned to more lateral growth and also to increased rooting, especially fine root growth. More fine roots increase the overall plant health and help trees, shrubs and other plants in stressful situations like drought. PGRs can also simply reduce the need for constant pruning, doing much of the work throughout a growing season on its own. This reduction in cell elongation also leads to increased chlorophyll content in leaves simply because the growth has been compacted, which can lead to greener color and healthier plants.

JW: The most serious problem with trees is controlling their growth into utility lines. The idea with PGRs is not to stop

growth, but rather to reduce it so the tree can renew itself and achieve a reasonably normal appearance. Some advantages include reducing sprout growth. This will extend the trimming cycle, which will lead to less maintenance expenses.

Q: WHAT SHOULD LAWN CARE OPERATORS KEEP IN MIND WHEN USING PGRs?

AH: Not all PGRs are the same. Some PGRs, like paclobutrazol, are absorbed by the roots of plants and therefore, must be applied as a drench around the base of the tree or shrub or watered in if applied to turfgrass. Other PGRs, like prohexadione-Ca, are absorbed by plant foliage and applied as foliar sprays.

JW: Since PGR applications are mostly broadcast applications as opposed to spot treatments, calibration of the application equipment and the applicator is important. Lawn care operators should select properties that will provide the best return on investment: properties with higher labor requirements and large treatment areas that will allow the highest reallocation of personnel.

Q: WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF USING PGRs ON LAWNS?


AH: PGR use in lawns makes a lot of sense, especially in the spring growth flush because we are constantly mowing off top growth and simply discarding it. A PGR application timed in the spring can limit that top growth and help to distribute energy spent on something that would be trashed elsewhere, like roots and more lateral growth. Not

only is top growth reduced, but the redirected energy can work to improve plant health and make the plant ready for the stresses of summer, like heat and drought, while improving its visual quality at the same time.

JW: PGRs can slow the vertical growth of the turfgrass, allowing for fewer mowing visits; less trimming and edging; reallocating labor for other tasks; reducing clippings; and maintaining safety in hard-to-mow areas, such as slopes and obstacles. Also, the turfgrass has a healthier appearance as it will grow more horizontally as opposed to vertically. In addition, every trip to the site has costs: fuel, wear and tear on the vehicles and equipment and, of course, travel time. Work at the job site has costs too. This includes the fixed costs, like labor and supplies, as well as opportunity costs. Every hour your crews are spending on one project is an hour not being spent on another project.

Many companies are finding a place for shrub growth regulators in their maintenance programs by using them to free up labor for other work.

Q: ARE PGRs MORE EFFECTIVE IN CERTAIN SEASONS OR REGIONS?

AH: PGRs are longer lasting in cooler climates. Trees in northern climates may be affected or somewhat regulated by a paclobutrazol treatment for years, while trees in the deep south will not be affected for as long, maybe even half the time, relatively. These PGRs are metabolized in the plant faster as temperatures increase. 

THE BIG ONE

Planting perfection

LOCATION Bethesda, Md.

COMPANY Planted Earth Landscaping

DETAILS The client spends a lot of time outside and wanted a garden that fit her family's needs. She engaged Planted Earth Landscaping to improve her failing landscape on a new build site after two years in the ground.

Planted Earth manages the irrigation, lighting, plantings and turf care on the site, which goes through three rotations of annual plantings a year. When Planted Earth took over, several issues needed attention.

"The soil was brutally compacted," says Chris Vedrani, president of Planted Earth Landscaping. "There was no real drainage. As we began to pressure test the irrigation system, a lot of it had been compromised at one point or another. We found pipes that were broken underground."

Crews vertically mulched the property with sand and organic material, addressed drainage through auguring and installed a Rain Bird irrigation system. Boxwood blight was an issue at the front of the property, so crews removed the infected plants and added new soil.

"(The client) was insistent on replacing the boxwoods," Vedrani says. "Now, they are on a very aggressive fungicide program. The boxwoods get sprayed seven times a year."

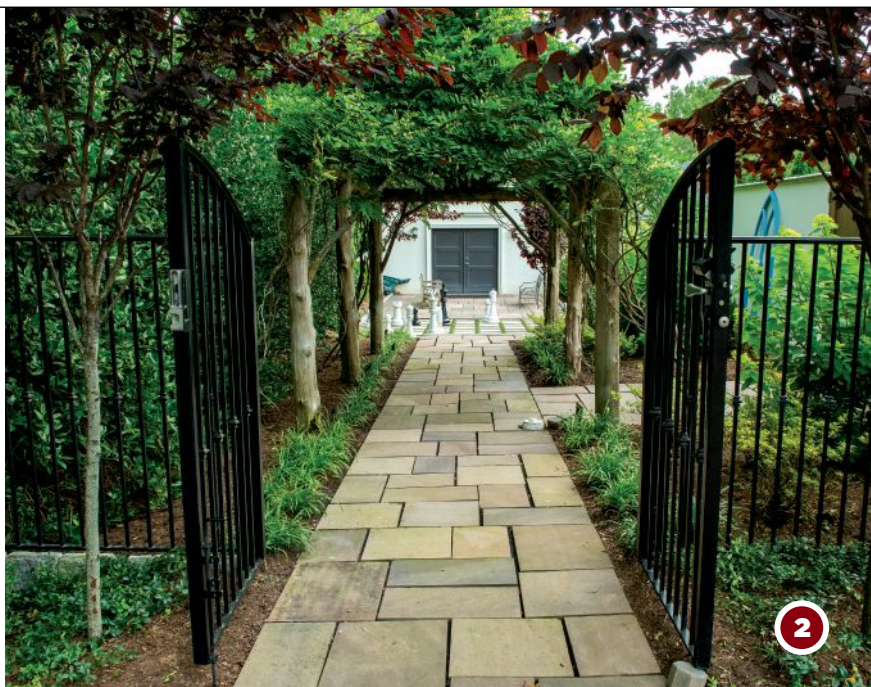
Vedrani says another challenge is the client's high expectations. "It has been a constant conversation that patience is a virtue," he says.

This project earned Planted Earth Landscaping a 2020 Gold Award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence program.

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



PHOTOS: THOMAS WALKER PHOTO



Captions | 1. Crews deadhead the Knock Out roses that line the play lawn area weekly. 2. Crews prune wisteria vines weekly to maintain the arch that leads to the family's outdoor chess board. 3. To restore the turf and garden, Planted Earth mulched the property with sand and organic material, addressed drainage issues and installed a new irrigation system. 4. Planted Earth's master gardeners create weekly arrangements using the client's cutting garden. 5. Planted Earth's master gardeners design and install annual arrangements in the terra-cotta planters that dot the client's garden. 6. Crews deadhead flowering plants and rake the pea gravel paths weekly. Master gardeners use the hydrangeas in weekly arrangements for the client. 7. Taxus hedging contrasts a sloping walkway, where hydrangeas, roses and Kwanzan cherry trees create seasonal color interest.

MAINTAIN YOUR EDGE

Protect your brand

Lessons in growth from a leader at LandCare

BY ABBY HART | LM SENIOR EDITOR

When Jim Kelley started at LandCare in 2015, the company was in the midst of a transition. Mike Bogan had recently been named as CEO, and the company was undergoing a multimillion dollar rebrand from TruGreen LandCare to LandCare.

The company culture also presented challenges. “The sales staff at the time was driven to sell work at any price to get commission,” Kelley recalls. “Production teams required a certain number of hours to satisfy the client, but salespeople reduced those hours and threw low-bid jobs at the team to earn more commission.”

Kelley is LandCare’s regional vice president of SoCal and Southwest, a territory which in 2020, included seven branches in Southern California, Las Vegas and Phoenix. He says that throughout this transition and to this day, Bogan reminded the leadership team to protect the brand at all costs.

With the company’s portfolio comprised mostly of low-margin work, unhappy clients and unhappy team

members, the company took a big step in an effort to improve operations and job quality: It eliminated sales commission for all team members companywide.

“With this strategy, we now had a better chance of selling work agreeable to the operations team,” he said. “It was critical the entire company realize that this change had long-term value. (Team members) knew they were going to have to build relationships, earn trust, deliver problem-resolving solutions and sell the work.”

LandCare provides landscape maintenance including enhancements and irrigation to a completely commercial clientele. In 2020, it reported revenue of \$208 million. Kelley’s region reports 21 percent year over year portfolio growth and 91 percent client retention.

Kelley explains some of the ways his team protects the LandCare brand and stays successful in commercial landscaping.

DEFINE YOUR IDEAL CLIENT

As LandCare began to replace low-bid clients with higher-value clients, it

prompted a big question: Who do we want to work with and why?

“We want to work with engaged clients who participate in win-win situations — people who appreciate a better quality of service and people who will take the time to strengthen relationships by sharing information and their perspective,” Kelley says.

Kelley had more than 20 years of his own experience in the landscape industry prior to joining LandCare, having worked for The Brickman Group and Palma Azul Landscape, a San Diego landscape company that was acquired by LandCare. He says it takes hard work upfront to qualify a good potential client. That step can happen before or during the request for proposal process.

On the other hand, quickly disqualifying clients who don’t fit your ideal client type is an important step. “When an opportunity shows up, get to ‘yes’ or ‘no’ on submitting a bid as quickly as possible,” Kelley says. “Who do we not want to work with? Let’s save ourselves some time and not try to win a bad contract.”

For commercial clients such as a homeowners association (HOA), Kelley says that the ideal scenario would be to communicate with a single decision-maker, such as a knowledgeable property manager who is able to guide and influence the HOA’s board of directors.

DEVELOP A “NEXT COMPANY UP” MINDSET

Kelley says his team has a diverse mix of valued clients who help the company earn referrals off their current work, and his team also seeks to qualify itself with potential clients at the same time.

“We have relationships with prospects who currently have a relationship

Continued on page 42



Jim Kelley



WORKING TOGETHER

Sales commission was eliminated companywide at LandCare so the operations team is more agreeable to the work that’s sold.



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MAINTAIN YOUR EDGE

Continued from page 40

with a provider they're happy with, but it's always been our goal to develop a 'next company up' mentality," he explains. This means LandCare wants to be the next qualified contractor to be called, should the current contractor fail to perform. "We're not aggressively hard selling, which turns everyone off, but we're trying to connect and be a real resource, and that allows real interaction to occur."

The company works with associations like the Building Owners and Managers Association and has social events such as Zoom calls and, pre-COVID, cooking classes. The interactions with "next company up" clients are geared toward building trust and gathering information on

any pain points, like poor quality landscape service, poor communications or frequently changing crews, which could lead to lost information.

Patience is a factor when connecting future clients, however. "Our 2020 wins, that groundwork was laid in 2019 and 2018. You have to commit to a longer sales cycle — about one to five years," Kelley says. "But, you're deciding on the cadence of the touches. Qualify yourself and earn their consideration when pain does show up."

BUILD RELATIONSHIPS WITH INTENTION

As a desirable LandCare prospect begins showing interest in working with the company, "we challenge everyone to determine who is the best, deepest

Continued on page 44

ON DECK

LandCare works with prospects to be next in line if their current contractor isn't measuring up.



PHOTO: LANDCARE

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ONCE A CUSTOMER, ALWAYS FAMILY.



DWIGHT BIZZELL

Bizzell Nursery & Lawn Care has been a staple in the Sikeston, MO, community for over 40 years, offering, among other services, lawn fertilizing, weed control, mowing, custom landscape design, and even a fully stocked nursery. How have they been able to offer their wide range of services for so long? They believe in treating their customers like family.

That's why, when Dwight Bizzell, vice president and head of spraying services, first came across Steel Green Manufacturing, he knew he would be partnering with them for his company's spreader/sprayer equipment.

"We treat our customers like family," Bizzell said. "And so does Steel Green."

To Bizzell and his company, treating customers like family means creating trust, being responsive, and genuinely caring about their needs. Bizzell believes Steel Green exemplifies these virtues with their exceptional customer support and parts service.

"If you're running a machine 9 to 10 hours a day, something is going to wear out and need to be replaced," Bizzell said. "You need to know the company you work with understands this and is motivated to get the replacement parts to you quickly."

He continued, "If you call Steel Green before 10 am, you can trust those parts are going to be on your doorstep in the next 24-48 hours. There's no other company in the same league when it comes to customer service, especially when it comes to parts."

Bizzell also believes treating customers like family means going the extra mile for them. He experienced this first-hand from Steel Green Manufacturing when he ordered his machines and was able to completely customize them to fit his application needs.

"When we were customizing our SG36 and SG52 zero-turn spreader/sprayers, Steel Green listened to me explain what we wanted the first time, even bringing in my dealer rep, and built it. No shortcuts. They make it happen," said Bizzell.

"THERE'S NO OTHER COMPANY IN THE SAME LEAGUE WHEN IT COMES TO CUSTOMER SERVICE, ESPECIALLY WHEN IT COMES TO PARTS."

He pointed out, "Ordering a custom machine can be difficult sometimes, but Steel Green has turned the process into something that is considered normal now. They've got it down pat."

Located in the transition zone, the lawn care company deals with a mixture of warm-season and cool-season lawns. Bizzell's custom Steel Green machines—with options for spraying two different chemicals simultaneously through the dual boom system while also spreading granular—make applications on the different lawn types easier.

"If I didn't have customized machines," Bizzell said. "I couldn't spray a warm-season lawn with a chemical and then go straight next door to a cool-season lawn. I would have to route a whole different day for a certain type of lawn. Our efficiency has just been maximized."

For the full story, visit steelgreenmfg.com/customer-stories/.

MAINTAIN YOUR EDGE

Continued from page 42

contact with that prospect or client,” Kelley says. That person deepens trust by offering consultative information and follows through all the way through to the end of the sale.

The consideration and intentionality when it comes to determining a client’s LandCare contact goes a long way to ensuring their happiness and protecting the brand. “It’s so much easier to sell to a happy client than a client you don’t know,” he says. “We need loyal clients who give us a chance to make them happy — and when we find that win-win relationship and we don’t take advantage of it, we’ll have them forever.”

PEOPLE MATTER

Kelley says that because quality service is

crucial to protecting the brand, LandCare makes hires long before there’s a dire need, which allows new hires to be fully trained and evaluated before they face customers.

“Many (companies) wait too long to hire, they’re leaking at the seams and have customer complaints, and in the meantime, they’re damaging their credibility,” Kelley says.

LandCare uses behavioral assessment tools like the Predictive Index when hiring for or promoting team members into roles like branch manager, business development manager, account manager, production manager and above. This step is an effort to ensure the person’s personality traits match the skills required of those positions.

“We have an awareness of specific individual strengths and weaknesses,

and we’re always trying to improve,” Kelley says.

The company focuses on training and promoting from within and identifying future leaders and training them for potential promotions and certifications like licensed pesticide applicator, irrigation auditor or certified arborist.

Kelley has one final note for landscape companies: Don’t put your best and most efficient people on your most challenging, lower-margin jobs.

“That’s reactive, and it doesn’t make sense,” Kelley says. “Your best people should be working on your best jobs, with clients who are the most important to you or have more work to offer you. Don’t sacrifice your superior level of quality with your most important clients.”



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PRODUCTS THAT WORK

String trimmers

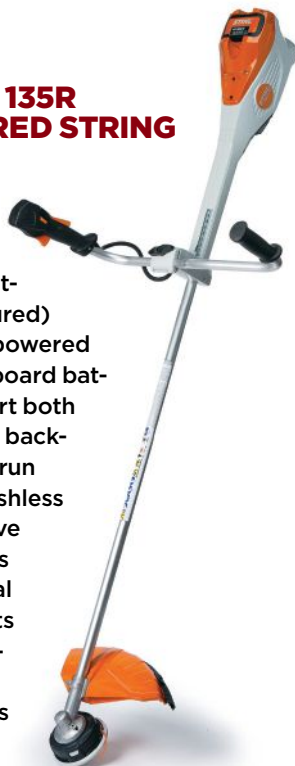


FSA 135 AND FSA 135R BATTERY-POWERED STRING TRIMMERS

COMPANY: Stihl

URL: StihlUSA.com

Part of the new Stihl 135 professional battery platform, the FSA 135 (pictured) and FSA 135 R battery-powered trimmers feature an onboard battery slot that can support both an onboard battery or a back-pack battery for longer run times. Paired with a brushless motor and the same drive and cutting components used in Stihl professional gas trimmers, these units deliver professional cutting performance comparable to Stihl gas units with no exhaust emissions and low noise. The trimmers are versatile for different cutting applications, including trimming, cutting and weed clearing.



SRM-410X TRIMMER

COMPANY: Echo

URL: Echo-USA.com

New for spring 2021 is Echo's SRM-410X. With a 42-cc engine that generates 2.23 hp, this trimmer has the power to last six to eight hours a day and is designed for heavy clearing. It's ideal for tall, heavy grasses, hilly terrain, ditches and weed abatement, according to the company. The SRM-410X comes with a two-year commercial warranty.



525LST TRIMMER

COMPANY: Husqvarna

URL: Husqvarna.com

Husqvarna's 525LST features a powerful and fuel-saving X-Torq engine. Under the high-visibility guard spins 19 inches of cutting line driven by a powerful gear-box capable of accommodating a longer line length and higher revolutions per minute, according to the company. The 525LST features a 19-inch cutting swath.



XRU17PT 18V X2 LXT BRUSHLESS CORDLESS STRING TRIMMER

COMPANY: Makita

URL: MakitaTools.com

The Makita XRU17PT string trimmer has power equivalent to a 30-cc gas string trimmer, according to the company. It also has lower noise, zero emissions and reduced maintenance. Features include a 17-inch cutting swath, a steel drive shaft and three speeds (4,600/5,500/7,000 revolutions per minute). The reverse rotation function allows the user to quickly clear the trimmer head of entangled grass and weeds. It's powered by the same 18-volt batteries that run 275-plus other LXT products.



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LOCATION Denver

COMPANY Lifescape Colorado

DETAILS The owners of this 1920s Tudor-style home in Denver's Park Hill neighborhood wanted to maximize their backyard space for frequent and lively activity.

As it turns out, Lifescape Colorado had renovated the property two decades prior.

"(When) the new homeowners learned we did the original landscape renovation, they called us to update the backyard space," says LeAnn Ostheimer, Lifescape's executive vice president of design/build. "The existing space felt small, especially considering how the plants matured and took up additional space."

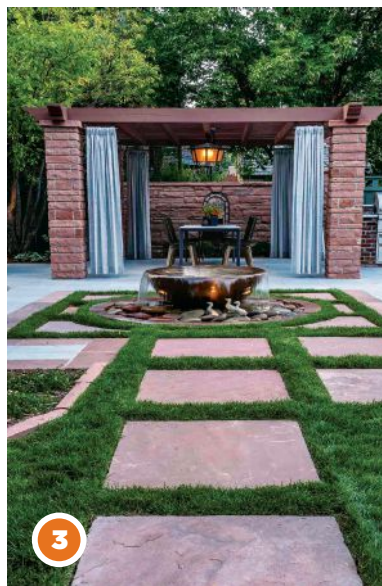
Large trees planted too close to the home's foundation posed a challenge, and a mix of sun and shade meant there were multiple microclimates. Additionally, the team had to tear down an entire fence for better access from the alleyway.

"Due to close proximity to neighbors, we adjusted our project schedule and regularly cleaned the dust from the demo," Ostheimer says.

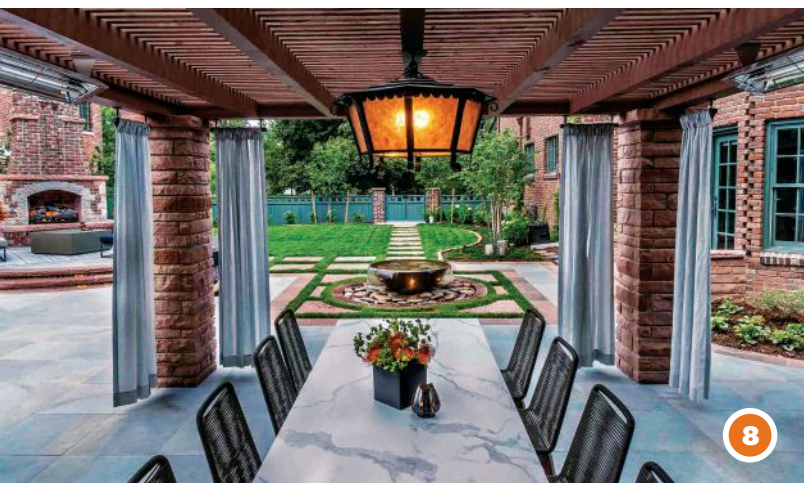
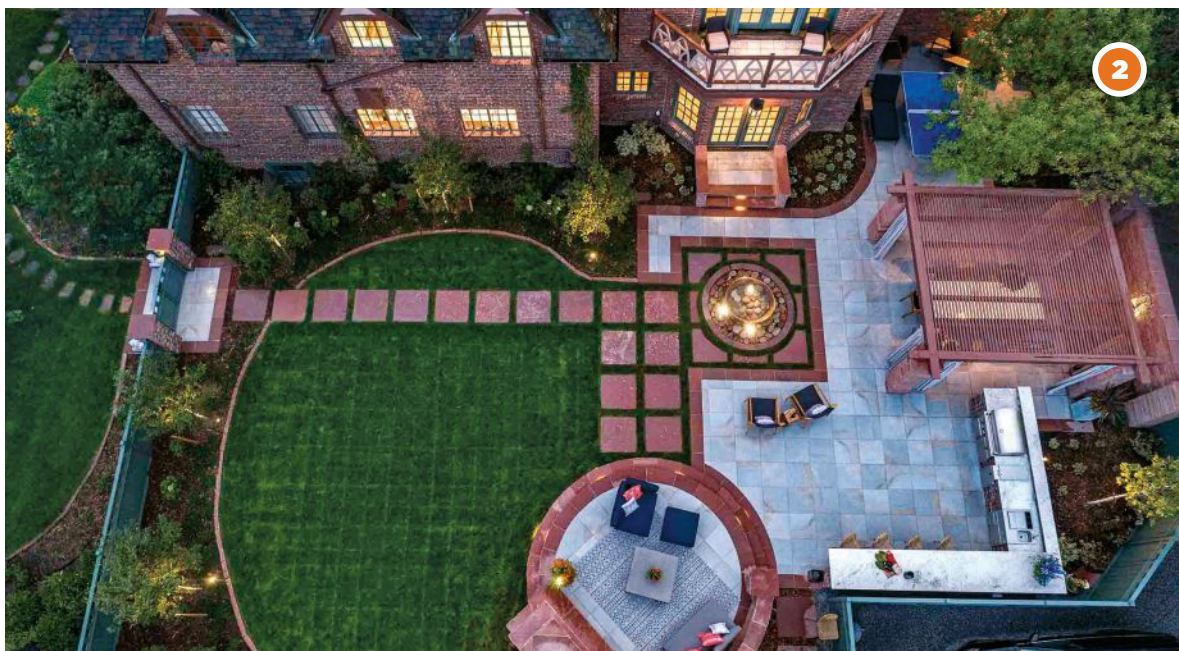
By removing existing plant material and hardscape, the landscape was opened up to appear three times its original size. A mix of modern Mirage tile and classic brick plus circular and square elements create a contemporary oasis. Following the project's completion, Lifescape Colorado took over maintenance on the property.

The project won Lifescape Colorado a 2020 Gold Award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence program.

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



PHOTOS: LIFESCAPE COLORADO



Captions | **1.** The view from the elevated outdoor fireplace captures the blue-toned Mirage tile and red flagstone accents. **2.** A bird's-eye view of the many distinct areas of the property, which is maintained weekly. Here, you can see the double-cutting of the turf to ensure an even cut. **3.** The meticulous edging of the turf around the pavers and other hardscapes requires extra care so debris doesn't end up in the water feature. **4.** With a detailed weekly management program, the Lifescape Colorado team takes care to show no signs of their visit on the paver and tile areas. **5.** The clients wanted an outdoor space to match the design of their Tudor-style home and to provide ample entertaining space, with a hands-off maintenance approach. **6.** A before shot of the pre-existing privet hedges, which require hand pruning and shearing to feel cohesive with the new design. **7.** The team uses nets, skimmers and organic algaeicide weekly to keep the water in the custom copper fountain as clean as possible. **8.** The view from the pergola captures the trees and plantings around the lawn's edge. These plants are tended to weekly, including an integrated pest management program.

PRODUCTS THAT WORK

Compact excavators



TB235-2 COMPACT EXCAVATOR

COMPANY: Takeuchi U.S.

URL: Takeuchi-US.com

Easy to transport to and from the job site, Takeuchi's TB235-2 is designed to tackle a wide range of applications, including landscaping, construction

and utility work. All-steel construction makes the TB235-2 durable, while its rounded body improves visibility to the sides and rear. It is equipped with a long arm, auxiliary hydraulics plumbed to midarm and an integrated thumb mount. Takeuchi's Fleet Management (TFM) telematics system comes standard; the first two years of service are included at no charge. TFM will reduce downtime, control costs, perform remote diagnostics and help secure assets, Takeuchi said.

35G COMPACT EXCAVATOR



COMPANY: John Deere

URL: JohnDeere.com

The John Deere 35G is a compact excavator designed for rental, commercial/residential building and landscaping, as well as underground and site development. It offers a Final Tier 4 engine and improved operator comfort with a longer and wider operator's station, as well as increased visibility to work in close quarters comfortably and safely. Additionally, the 35G can be equipped with optional attachments, including adjustable angle backfill blades, hydraulic breakers, augers and a variety of track options.



CX37C MINI EXCAVATOR

COMPANY: Case Construction Equipment

URL: CaseCE.com

With an operating weight of 7,990 pounds and a 24.4-hp Tier 4 Final engine, the CX37C boasts a bucket digging force of 6,900 pounds and a digging depth of 10 feet, 3 inches. The machine is available in a zero-tail-swing, short-radius or conventional design and features an adjustable boom offset for improved maneuverability in congested areas and an autoshift travel system for operator convenience in varying terrain. Standard features include auxiliary hydraulics and a backfill blade.



306 CR MINI HYDRAULIC EXCAVATOR

COMPANY: Caterpillar

URL: Caterpillar.com

The Cat 306 CR mini hydraulic excavator features heavy-duty main structures, a fuel-efficient engine, load-sensing hydraulics, a spacious cab and a Cat Stick Steer system in the 6-ton class. With its long stick option, the 306 CR delivers a maximum dig depth of 162 inches and a 15,821-pound maximum operating weight when equipped with the sealed and pressurized cab. Built with a swing boom, the mini excavator's compact radius provides a low, 58-inch tail swing with counterweight. The Cat 306 CR delivers a lift performance of up to 7,839 pounds at a 9.8-foot radius.



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BUSINESS BOOSTERS

Crafted with care

Design experts explain how they create natural water features that last

BY ABBY HART | LM SENIOR EDITOR



WATCH AND LEARN
FallingWater Scapes' Jonathan Marston recommends online training courses such as Aquascape University for seasoned and novice water feature installers.

“What I like about water features is that there’s a high degree of craftsmanship,” says Jonathan Marston, owner and designer of FallingWater Scapes, a water feature company based in Dover, Mass. “You get to work on an overall design, and you get to be very hands-on.”

FallingWater Scapes specializes in designing and installing water features, and it works with landscape companies who may not be well versed in designing or installing water features or who don’t have the capability to maintain them.

Marston estimates that up to 60 percent of his business has come from homeowners looking to repair or replace water features that were installed incorrectly.

“I think people con-

flate landscaping expertise with water feature expertise,” he says. “That results in a feature that doesn’t work the way it should.”

John Peterson, project director for Exscape Designs in Novelty, Ohio, advises installers to take their time and make sure they’re doing it the right way.

“You should look at it like you have one chance to do this right,” he says. “Some water features are large, and the access is terrible once everything is landscaped, so they can be very difficult to repair later.”

Marston and Peterson talk with *Landscape Management* about some common

pitfalls when it comes to designing and installing water features.

THE RIGHT FEATURE

It’s important to take into account how the feature fits into the site.

Sometimes, clients request a water feature and fail to recognize their property may not be suited to it, Peterson says. For example, a client with a flat lot asking for a natural water feature with waterfalls and elevation falls into this category.

Peterson’s company, Exscape Designs, provides design/build, maintenance and irrigation services to a mostly residential clientele. The company installs water features from Aquascape and Atlantic Water Gardens.

Marston says aesthetics count when designing a water feature. “Sometimes, I see features that look like what I call UFOs,” he says. “They look like they just land on the landscape and aren’t built into the landscape.”

For instance, when streams are built too high, they look like volcanoes, he says. A lower-elevation water feature built with more soil helps it appear more integrated into the landscape, Marston says. He recommends tapering out an 8-foot berm for every vertical foot of elevation.

Lower elevation and more soil provides structure around the feature, prevents erosion and lengthens the life of the feature, he says.

COMMON PROBLEMS

Marston says typical problems he sees include incorrectly installed fittings or

gaskets as well as leaks in the rubber liner and padding, which result from installers not working carefully around the liner and inadvertently creating holes in the material.

Peterson agrees. “When you try to tear a 45-mil pond liner in your hands, it’s pretty much impossible, but if you put that liner in the ground and start moving heavy boulders, you could tear it real fast,” he says.

He recommends establishing a top perimeter of the liner to ensure water isn’t leaking over the edges and using a fabric liner layered over the rubber liner.

FINISHING TOUCHES

Although his company does install natural water features, Peterson says contemporary, formal water features are becoming more popular.

“We’re seeing things trending like an urn that’s recirculating or a basalt column or a masonry wall with spouts built into the side, more like a focal point,” he says, noting that these can be easier to install and cheaper than a traditional natural water feature, which could cost between \$15,000 and \$50,000. A small recirculating water feature may range from \$8,000 to \$20,000.

Marston says that whatever style of water features the clients choose, they’re inspired by the look and sound of water found in nature. “It’s about adding dimension and drawing the client out into a space they’ve already invested in, like a patio, with a water feature that plays on the senses,” he says. 🗣️



Jonathan Marston



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SOFTWARE UPDATE

From design to reality

Design experts describe software features that help bring their designs to life

BY SARAH WEBB
LM MANAGING EDITOR

Landscape design software providers have stepped up their game in the past several years to help landscape designers — and their customers — visualize a completed project.

“It’s about creating a design in a format that the customer can easily understand,” says David Sloan, sales manager at Pro Landscape by Drafix Software. “The 2D drawing is important too because your crews need to be able to read that and know the plan, but the visual part is what the customer likes.”

Both Sloan and Eileen Kelly, owner and landscape designer of Dig Your Garden Landscape Design in San Anselmo, Calif., lay out the digital tools landscape designers can use to make their designs come to life.

MAKE IT POP

Kelly, who has been using Vectorworks Landmark software for about 12 years,

says the 3D imaging capabilities of the software help bring her plans to another level for clients to understand.

“Before presenting to a client, I’m able to visualize a lot better how things will look if I’m creating walls or stairways,” she says. “When the client sees it, it’s a big wow. They really get it, and it brings it to a whole other level, a little closer to reality than a 2D view.”

She adds that the ability to go from 2D to 3D quickly and having the screens side by side when moving items in the 2D drawing enable her to see how the added element would look in 3D.

PHOTO FRIENDLY

To further help clients understand a finished design, Pro Landscape by Drafix offers a tablet app that contractors can bring into the field, take photos, tap in plant materials and show their clients.

“It’s interactive with the customer, and it’s efficient,” Sloan says. “With the photo, you’re capturing what their space looks like now, and then you come in and add items from the (materials) library,

and while it’s not a 3D model, it’s a 3D look. You can create a 3D rendering from it too. It’s not a scale drawing until you create that with the 2D, but it’s a visual, so the customer gets an idea of things they like and things they don’t like.”

← LAYER IT UP
Designs with multiple layers help designers, contractors and customers envision the final product.



ALL IN
Having a designer committed to learning and using a software product helps ensure designs are executed with clients’ wishes in mind.



Sloan cautions that in order to make such designs a reality, contractors need to make sure they also have their 2D drawing in hand, so they can properly space plants, account for materials and tally up the final costs.

LAYERS ON LAYERS

The capability to move certain layers of a design aside when not in use is another game-changer for Kelly. She says the ease of having the layers allows her to change from a full color plan when she’s designing to a black and white plan when giving the plans to the contractor.

GUESSTIMATING BE GONE

Many software options also include an estimating feature, where designers can create a quote and materials list.

“Being able to keep track of your materials accurately is important,” Sloan says. “If you don’t know exactly how much mulch to put on the truck, you may put too much and lose money on a job, so you have to be careful with that.”

COMMIT TO THE SOFTWARE

Both Kelly and Sloan say it’s important to set aside a chunk of time to learn the ins and outs of the software.

“A lot of people who have been drawing by hand all these years, when they first use the software, they’re not going to be better with the software than hand drawings right away,” Sloan says. “There are a lot of benefits to moving to software — accuracy, time management — but you have to be committed to doing it that way and learn how to do it properly.”

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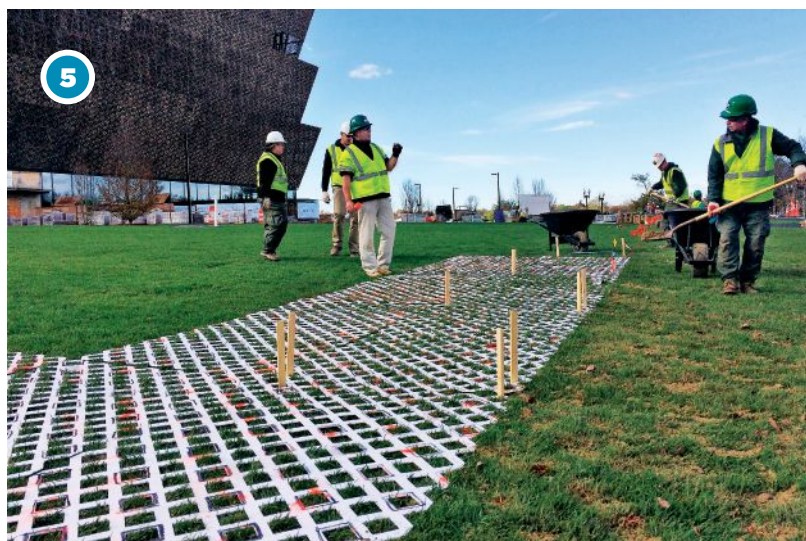
DETAILS Occupying the last available space on the National Mall, the Smithsonian's National Museum of African American History and Culture (NMAAHC) was completed in spring 2016. Ruppert Landscape's scope of work for this project included landscape, irrigation, soils, site amenities, stone curb, concrete flatwork, concrete walls, pavers and water features. Ruppert handles the mowing for the site while in-house teams maintain the irrigation, landscape and turf.

Adjacent to the landscape elements, 16,000 linear feet of drip irrigation and 4,000 square feet of spray irrigation were installed. Michael Guetig, irrigation specialist for the Smithsonian, says the irrigation system and the NMAAHC weather station, are tied into a Rain Bird Maxicom central control system.

NMAAHC's irrigation system is connected to a water harvesting system. The museum's site is one of the lowest in D.C., so a 70-foot deep hole had to be made watertight before the building could go up. The dewatering pumps collect the groundwater, send it to a 65,000-gallon cistern, which then feeds a system that regulates the water's pH, filters it and treats it with ultraviolet light. It then goes into a 15,000-gallon tank to be used for irrigation and in the museum's toilets.

The project earned Ruppert Landscape a Grand Award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence program.

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



PHOTOS: RUPPERT LANDSCAPE (1-5); MICHAEL GUETIG (6)



Captions | **1.** Great partnerships, strong communication and resources to work through the details — often out of sequence and out of flow — helped mitigate and eliminate delays that could have taken place, ultimately bringing this much-awaited museum to fruition. **2.** With limited staging areas on-site and the volume of work and various trades, materials that couldn't be scheduled as just-in-time deliveries and immediately installed were often moved several times as staging areas became active work areas. **3.** Five hundred truckloads of gravel, 625 truckloads of soil, 15 tractor-trailer loads of plant material (including trees) and 92 loads of concrete were delivered, and 52 loads of debris and soil were hauled off the site in 10 months. **4.** The fountain's base required close coordination with the fountain contractor. Numerous shop drawings, submittals and requests for information were managed to ensure the dimensional stone fountain and drains worked symbiotically to produce a one-of-a-kind product. More than 220 yards of concrete were delivered to the area via a concrete pump truck to create the base, troughs and walls. **5.** A two-man crew used a specially created lattice tool as a guide to evenly spray paint holes for approval by the landscape architect. Then, a six-man crew used 1.5-inch spade bits to bore through the sod into the soil with a third crew following behind on hands and knees to place three bulbs per hole at 9 inches in the center. Adjustments had to be made along the way in areas where soil had settled below the turf, requiring corrections to grade before the bulb installation could be completed. **6.** Ruppert Landscape subcontractor Nature Unlimited installed the mainline for the irrigation system.

IRRIGATION TECH

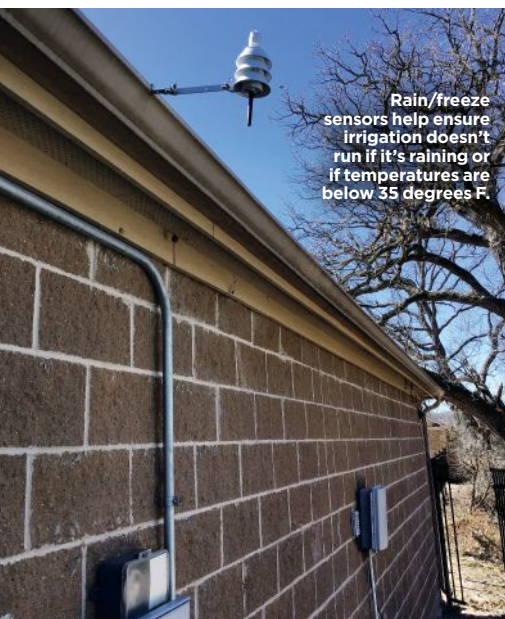
Good sense

An irrigation expert shares best practices for using and maintaining rain/freeze sensors

BY ABBY HART | LM SENIOR EDITOR

When irrigation pros run into inclement weather, rain/freeze sensors are a useful item to have on their clients' properties. A rain/freeze sensor is a single device that detects rain and freezing temps. They're designed to break contact with the common wire in the irrigation system if it receives a preset amount of rain or if the temperature drops below a certain point, typically 35 degrees F.

Chris Lee, president of Earthworks, a \$26 million company in Lillian, Texas, says, "Having an evapotranspiration-based irrigation system for irrigation control is the Cadillac option since that takes into account the weather and recalculates your water schedule daily. If you can't do that, you should install a rain/freeze sensor so that the system doesn't run when it absolutely shouldn't."



Rain/freeze sensors help ensure irrigation doesn't run if it's raining or if temperatures are below 35 degrees F.

Earthworks provides 50 percent maintenance, 30 percent design/build, 15 percent irrigation and 5 percent tree care services to mostly commercial clients.

Rain/freeze sensors have been mandated in Texas since 2008. Earthworks charges about \$200 installed for a sensor and uses Weathermatic rain/freeze sensors that are connected to SmartLink controllers.

Lee explains why rain/freeze sensors can be useful for irrigation companies and offers tips for proper use and maintenance.

SET FOR SUCCESS

Lee explains that it's important to consider where the sensor is going to be located and to be sure to install the sensor where it's open to the environment and free of obstructions like tree branches.

"If you have a rain sensor, don't install it under the eave of the building or in a heavily treed area because it doesn't get rained on," Lee says. "And, don't install a rain/freeze sensor next to a dryer vent because the heat emitted from the dryer will cause the sensor to think it's warmer than 35 degrees outside."

POWER

Lee says that because almost all sensors are wireless, it's crucial to make sure you've got good signal strength. He notes that rain/freeze sensors typically last three to four years on commercial sites and longer on residential sites.

On the controller, techs should ensure the sensor switch isn't set to bypass, which stops the sensor from working.

Companies also should remind clients to check and replace batteries each year.

Earthworks sends notices Oct. 1 every year asking clients to replace the batteries and to call Earthworks if they'd like their sensors inspected.



Chris Lee

MAINTENANCE

It's important to keep tabs on installed sensors. "In commercial settings, what you'll see is they'll call on a construction company to replace some siding and wherever the sensor was screwed into the building, the sensor got thrown in the dumpster and nobody says anything," Lee says.

Cleaning sensors once a year is sufficient, he says. Earthworks technicians use a can of compressed air to blow out the cracks and crevices in the device and ensure there's nothing sitting on top of it or growing around it.

CONSERVATION VERSUS SAFETY

Rain/freeze sensors, wind sensors and flow sensors are the common types of irrigation sensors. "All of these are conservation devices, not safety devices," Lee says, noting that if the rain/freeze sensor fails, an irrigation system could continue to run and create slippery and unsafe conditions in cold temperatures. Even if a rain/freeze sensor shuts off an irrigation system, a technician should still shut off the double-check valves to fully stop water from flowing.

"You can't be lazy. You have to go shut your systems off," Lee says. "They are designed to keep your system from coming on when it's zero degrees — you just can't rely on it from a life/safety perspective. Too often, we've seen people rely on that. It's a \$60 plastic part with a battery and an electronic transmitter that's outside when it's 120 degrees and outside when it's zero. You can't count on that to save people's lives." 🗣️



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MAINTENANCE SHOP

Keep on trenchin'

Trenchers are an important part of an irrigation crew's arsenal. Experts share how to keep them running smoothly. BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

Keeping up with maintenance may seem like a simple thing when it comes to trenchers, but it will pay dividends.

"The more you overlook, the more costly it is going to be," says Tom Zullo, owner of ATZ Irrigation. "With some of these things, you can basically stop the wear and tear."

ATZ Irrigation serves a 60 percent residential and 40 percent commercial clientele in the Odessa, Fla., area.

The easiest way to approach trencher maintenance is through three main categories: engine, hydraulics and service parts, says Brant Kukuk, Ditch Witch compact equipment product marketing manager. Contractors should look at the trencher's hour meter and refer to the operator's manual to understand what components need to be serviced when.

"Hold on to that manual near and dear," Kukuk says. "Put a calendar reminder on your phone. I would expect that machine to hit 200 hours in three months. Put up a reminder to help you with those intervals."

WHAT TO CHECK IN THE ENGINE AND HYDRAULIC SYSTEM

Walk-behind trencher engines are air cooled. Kukuk says it's important to keep the air filters clean and change the engine oil.

"If those two components (the air filter and oil) fail, you could fail an engine pretty easily," he says.

And, when it comes to hydraulic fluid, keep an eye on your trencher's hour meter.

"The hydraulic interval will creep up on you, and before you know it, you've got 1,000 hours on your machine, and you're still using the same oil," Kukuk says.

WHAT TO CHECK WITH SERVICE PARTS

Crews should walk around the trencher before use to ensure elements such as the track rubber, the chain tension and sprockets are in working order and do not need replacing. Zullo says his crews also check the trencher's control levers and neutral start so that the digging chain stops when the operator pulls the control lever.

"It's a simple five-minute walk around," Kukuk says. "Every day, you should be watching those components, making sure they're not needing to be replaced."

Additionally, don't neglect the grease on bearings because it can lead to bearing failure and cause shaft damage if the bearing fails.

"That's going to get extremely costly if you're replacing more than just the bearings," Kukuk says. "Grease is fairly cheap in comparison to those parts that are rotating on every piece of equipment you own."



KNOW WHAT TO MAINTAIN
Trencher maintenance can be broken down into three parts: the engine, hydraulics and service parts.

Chain maintenance is another area that's important to clean and maintain. Zullo says he learned the hard way with his Vermeer RTX200, RTX250 and RTX150 walk-behind tracked trenchers. His mechanic was spending a lot of time working on them.

"We have 15 of those trenchers, and we've found that once a week, spraying the dirt out helps maintain it a lot better," he says. "Otherwise, the dirt gets in the bearings, and the bearings wear down quicker. It's just spraying out the tracks once a week and cleaning out the wheels. If you don't keep those clean, the wear and tear on those could cost you double what it would be if you maintained them."

While maintenance may seem time-consuming, Kukuk says it's important to look at service and neglect as a cost either way. While it may cost time to service the machine, the machine itself will last longer, which saves money in the end. Neglect will slow your equipment and crews down.

"It's still going to cost you no matter what," Kukuk says. "It's going to cost you labor because you're spending four hours on that trench, where you could have done two or three trenches that day, but your machine wasn't running that well because you're neglecting the service parts." 🛠️



Tom Zullo

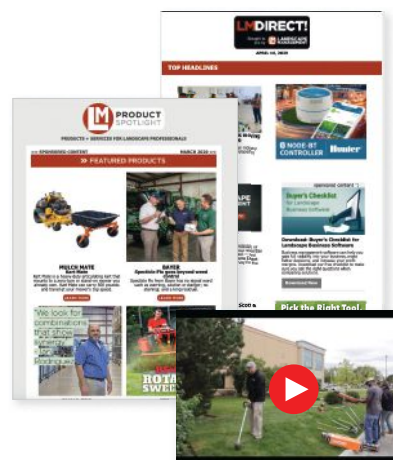


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FIVE QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Jennifer Chaplin

CEO

BOTANICA LANDSCAPES
YUBA CITY, CALIF.

1 Tell us about yourself and how you got started with Botanica Landscapes. We are one of the largest landscaping companies in our area. We do commercial and residential, installation and maintenance, public and privately funded projects. And about me personally? My ex-in-laws own the business. Eight years ago, I was a restaurant manager; they were looking for someone to work as a construction assistant. I didn't have any experience in landscaping, but I'm very good at bossing people around. I progressed from construction assistant eight years ago to being CEO, and I am in a contract to purchase the company. In the meantime, I'm divorced from their son, but it's all amicable; everyone is on board.

2 What are some trends you're seeing there in Northern California? Probably because of COVID, one of the biggest trends we've seen lately is in the residential work we do. We have more customers who want to do part of the work themselves. We've had a lot more residential work in 2020 because more people are at home, and they want to make their backyard into an oasis because they feel like they can't go anywhere. They have more time at home, so they want

us to come in and do the heavy work with our equipment ... with the Bobcat or the mini excavator, do the grading, those things ... then, they install the materials themselves. We've also had a lot more customers who thought they could do the work, and it turns out to be more than they can handle; they call us as well.

3 What is a tool you like to use to get the job done? Software. We've been trying to implement more software and use fewer manual processes. We've started using Jobber, and that has been very successful. The integration capabilities with QuickBooks will be good. We're also looking forward to using the scheduling component. On the construction side, we're using On Center software. That's something else we're setting up, but the capabilities of that program are wonderful. Everything including takeoff and placing the orders for the materials will streamline things quite a bit and eliminate some of our manual processes.

4 Do you have an especially memorable day at work that stands out in your mind? The day that changed us the most as a company is when we had a consultant come in and talk to us about setting up standard operating procedures (SOPs). That sounds so boring, but it really changed our company for the better! Now, we're setting up SOPs for every aspect of our business, including writing emails, setting appointments and putting together material lists. It's been monumental for our company. I'm all about being proactive. In construction, there are all sorts of things that can happen last minute, so you have to be flexible. There is freedom in processes, because once it's set up, you can focus on other things.

5 If you could have a dinner party and invite anyone, who would you invite, and what's on the menu? My son is 12. He is, as most 12-year-olds are, interested in YouTube. He and his friends think they'll be millionaires by age 18 by becoming YouTubers. One of the people he likes is MrBeast, who is very famous and very wealthy. I would invite him, my son and my sister, because she'd get a kick out of it ... and I'd ask him to have a very frank conversation with my son about how being a YouTuber works and what's required, the time commitment involved and how long he had been doing it before he became rich. And, we'd probably have tacos. 🌮

BEST ADVICE

"Keep emotions out of business — it's just business. I think we'd all be a lot better off if we acknowledged we're all here to make money and go forward with that. Remove secrecy and have open communication with each other."



A LOOK BACK

Leading the landscape

Back in 1986, *Weeds, Trees & Turf* (the former name of *Landscape Management*) conducted its first survey of the top 50 landscaping companies in the country. The Brickman Group topped that year's list, nearly three decades before its 2014 merger with ValleyCrest formed the industry giant BrightView. The industry has grown by leaps and bounds since 1986, when the top 50 landscape companies averaged \$4.7 million in revenue. View the full list at LandscapeManagement.net/lm-archive, and, if your company has more than \$10 million in revenue, don't forget to complete the 2021 LM150 entry form at LandscapeManagement.net/its-lm150-time-submit-your-entry-form-by-april-1/.



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It's time to refine your strategic vision



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.

As we step forward from a year of profound change, it's worth considering whether it's time for a strategic vision review and reset.

In his latest book, "Post Corona: From Crisis to Opportunity," bestselling author and business professor Scott Galloway notes, "A firm's value is a function of its numbers and narrative."

He explains that venture capitalists today give the greatest weight to a firm's vision, or its narrative about where it could be in a decade.

More important than having a vision is learning to communicate it with clarity. That's what earns the trust that opens doors to new relationships and opportunities.

Your landscaping business may never seek outside investors, but every day, it's marketing, recruiting and negotiating favorable terms for necessary services and resources.

The right narrative informs people about who you are and why that matters.

Most importantly, the narrative has to be true. If it lacks your conviction, then it will fail to pull you and your team through the good and the tough times.

“More important than having a vision is learning to communicate it with clarity. That's what earns the trust that opens doors to new relationships and opportunities.”

WHAT CAN WE DO THAT'S REALLY HARD?

One way to find your strategic vision is by asking, "What can we do that's really hard that will make people's lives better?"

Everything is difficult if you plan to do it consistently well. Some of the hardest things in business are clear communication, committed relationships and courageous leadership.

This makes them competitive advantages for those that master them.

Clear communication: One of my roles as a marketing consultant is interviewing my clients' customers to develop accurate buyer personas. It's not uncommon to discover customers are split on how well the company communicates, suggesting that improvement is needed.

Accurate, timely and complete communication is never easy, but

its impact is undeniable. Nowadays, there's no reason not to excel in this category if you design systems that use technology to capture data and use it to save people time.


Committed relationships: To win the long game, the most profitable companies in the world, with Amazon and Netflix being examples, depend on recurring revenue from loyal customers. These subscription relationships are the cheapest source of incremental value, provided you continue to earn trust.

Making the mindset shift from business transactions to relationships expands your vision. It focuses the company's resources on continuous improvement, elevating service to a point of distinction.

Courageous leadership: There's a good chance your company already champions important causes. Maybe now is the time to take that further. It's fair to say that the time has arrived for purpose-driven marketing.

Across the country, people are waking up to what's important in their lives, what's fundamentally meaningful. Economic, political and social issues are creating opportunities for courageous leaders to step up.

As a small business owner, you have a lot of people depending on your success. They deserve a meaningful narrative that reminds them why that matters.

If there is one initiative that could set your business on the right course this year and keep it there, it's reviewing and refining your strategic vision and its narrative. 



SAFETY BINGO

BY SARAH WEBB | LM MANAGING EDITOR

For Plantenance Landscape Group in Pointe-Claire, Quebec, Canada, safety is serious business, but there's no reason employees can't have a little fun with it, according to Glenn Curtis, founder and chief visionary officer of the company, which was founded 40 years ago.

Enter safety bingo. Each employee receives a bingo card upon onboarding, and every day the company goes without an accident, employees receive their bingo number for the day. Upon winning, employees can collect a gift certificate for items such as groceries or fuel, valued between \$100 and \$250.

"Employees have a chance to win extra money for being safe, which they should want to do anyway," Curtis says. "We did it initially to create a fun culture but also to make sure they take safety seriously. We value their safety, and if they play it safe, we'll tie it into a reward."

As with any game, there are rules. For example, employees must be on time to receive their number,



and if they're not present at work, they don't get their number for the day.

At the beginning of the season, the pot starts out at \$100 and goes up between \$20-\$50 every time there's a winner, maxing out at \$250. If there are double winners, they split the prize, and if there's a claimable accident, the pot goes back down to \$100. Employees can win a maximum of two times in a 30-day period.

The company started playing the game about 15 years ago, and in peak season, about 20 employees participate.

"Our safety record is phenomenal, and if we're late on issuing a number, we'll get a call from the foremen," Curtis says. "Money is a great motivator. Even for \$100 or \$200, it really works. Now, we're looking into bingo for key performance indicators. It's just about tying it into a behavior you want repeated." 🍀

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RESOURCES

[GROWING, GROWING ...]

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Has your company experienced significant growth recently, despite all the challenges faced by the landscape industry? If so, we want to hear how you did it. Email your story to Editor Christina Herrick at **cherrick@northcoastmedia.net**, and you just may be featured in an upcoming issue of LM.

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.



How to be a profit pro

We are coming off a great year at Grunder Landscaping, but success one year is no guarantee for the next, and there have been more years than I'd like to admit when we haven't hit our numbers. To win consistently, you must stay vigilant and continuously improve.

Over the years, I've identified a list of things that "profit pros" are keenly aware of. I define a profit pro as a person or company who knows how to make money. Profit pro companies are ones where the team enjoys working, where they understand what is required for success and their culture allows them to do their work without causing unnecessary headaches.

There are three key steps that companies striving to be profit pros can take this year to improve efficiency, reduce the chaos and increase profitability.

1 Sell to your ideal client.

To find your ideal client, you need to ask three questions about the relationship: Is it enjoyable, is it sustainable and is it profitable? If you can answer "yes" to each of those

“Profit pro companies are the ones where the team enjoys working, where they understand what is required for success ...”

questions, and the client fits your strategy, you're on a path to success. Profitable companies have a well-defined ideal client, and they work to find more clients like them, while turning down jobs that aren't a fit.


2 Use detailed site maps.

Selling work is great, but producing the work is where the profits come in by the truckload. Create and use a detailed job site map to ensure you make the most of a job. Note where you will park the truck, where you will start the work, where you will end the work and where the trouble spots are. Doing this ahead of time saves you time and aggravation on the job site.

Every wasted motion matters, and using tools like industry-specific software and even Google Maps to eliminate wasted time will improve profitability and make jobs easier for your team.

3 Bill and collect promptly.

People who follow me know something I love to teach are the four steps to great cash flow: sell the work, do the work, bill the work and collect the work. Imagine those four steps as gears connected to a crank. The faster you crank those four pieces, the healthier your company is.

Having a clear and precise process for billing and collecting on your work allows you to crank faster. At Grunder Landscaping, we bill maintenance work a month ahead of any production. For construction work, we collect a deposit upfront, then bill the remainder as soon as work is completed. We avoid letting construction jobs stretch on, so we can promptly bill for work already done. Collections are something everyone in our company is aware of, and our team knows that a sale doesn't count if it isn't collected. In our weekly sales meeting, we always talk about accounts receivable to keep us on track. 

Profit pros understand that running a successful and profitable company depends on doing many, many things well. At Grunder Landscaping, we've figured out what the critical list is for us, and on April 15, we'll share strategies, tips and tactics your company can use to complete your jobs this year with the greatest efficiency and the least amount of headaches. At the end of the day, a profitable job is one that the whole company enjoys doing, and we'll help you do more of them. Learn more and register: growgroupinc.com/profit-pros-virtual-workshop.



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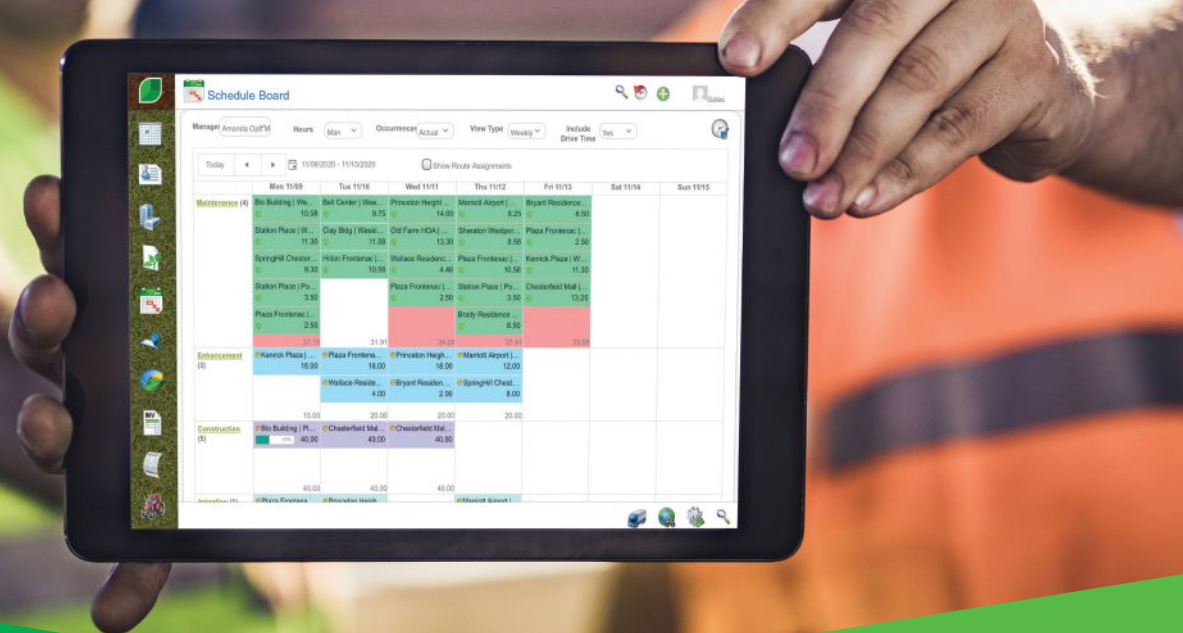
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