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ON THE COVER: Experts say attachments help crews work more efficiently as seen with this crew from Lamphear's Lawn Service in Medina, Ohio.
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[SAFETY TIPS]

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prioritize or incentivize safety? If so, we want to
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Graduation day

Two graduation invitations arrived in my mailbox today. They are for two great kids, and of course, both graduations happen on the same day, at the same time, 45 miles apart from one another.

The one I'll attend is for my one and only nephew Jett, whom I've written about here before. He's a hard worker, and when COVID-19 cost him his cool guy job as a lifeguard at the city pool, he started up his own lawn mowing operation. He's a senior in high school currently, and his next stop is the University of Kansas (KU). I couldn't be prouder, especially since both his mom and I went to school there.

For my birthday, Jett and my sister came over to help me celebrate. The topic of conversation quickly turned to Jett's future and what he was thinking of studying at KU. Like many kids his age, he doesn't know exactly what he wants to do or the degree he wants to pursue. He just knows the sticker shock of how

much it's going to cost to park on campus from month to month. Still, it's an

Seth Jones celebrates his birthday with his nephew Jett.



exciting time for him as he gets ready for this next journey.

"The journey" could be a theme for this month's issue of *LM*. There are several stories about the journeys people made when they were young that eventually led them to this industry. For some, as Amber Fox, director of human resources for Grunder Landscaping Co., put it, the industry found her. For others, they knew since they were old enough to sit behind the steering wheel and play pretend that this industry was their future.

“For some, as Amber Fox, director of human resources for Grunder Landscaping Co., put it, the industry found her. For others, they knew since they were old enough to sit behind the steering wheel and play pretend that this industry was their future.”

A textbook example of the latter is highlighted on page 54, where I sit down with John Jr. and Bill Caramanico. The company they co-own, C. Caramanico & Sons, is a fourth-generation family-owned company started by their great-grandpa Carmine in 1946. Both John Jr. and Bill knew since they were little that one day they would carry on their namesake company. The green industry is practically in their DNA.

In *We made it and so can you* (page 12), Editor Christina Herrick tells the stories of four successful women in the green industry and the journeys they took, the lessons they've learned along the way, to get where they are today. In *Opportunity knocks* (page 20), Herrick and Managing Editor Sarah Webb write on the topic of the National

Association of Landscape Professionals' Landscape Management Apprenticeship Program. That story focuses on a program lawn care and landscaping companies can embrace to guide people to a rewarding career in the green industry.

I told Jett as he mulled different careers, different areas of study, that the key was just to work hard on his grades and he'd know it when his journey leads him to the right path. It might not happen in his first semester or even his last. A source recently told me about the "\$9,000 knife set" his parents say they bought him — the cost of a one-and-done year in culinary school before exiting for the green industry. But all's well that ends well, he said, because he found an industry he's passionate about.

There's no telling if Jett's journey will be a straight line or if it will be winding, maybe even with a detour or two along the way, but as long as he finds something he's passionate about — like the professionals profiled in this issue have done — then the journey will be well worth it. 🍴



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MORE ONLINE

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

What's your advice to help landscape companies stay calm, cool and collected during the busy spring?

"The more systems you have, the more organization, the more great people who are on commission and the less debt you have will lead to a calm, cool and collected CEO."



Landscape Professionals

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Norcross, Ga.

Troy Clogg
Troy Clogg Landscape Associates
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Sun Valley Landscaping
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Phil Harwood
Grow the Bench
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Kevin Kehoe
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Laguna, Calif.

Jeffrey Scott
Jeffrey Scott Consulting
New Orleans, La.

"If you manage a calendar, schedule and set fair and honest expectations for yourself, your team and your clients, the spring will go as smooth as possible."



"Take time for yourself to pause and get clarity, exercise, eat well, sleep, see friends and family. At the end of the day, keep things in perspective. It's only landscaping, and most things can be corrected!"



"It's too easy amidst all the craziness to just live in the day to day and push meetings and longer-term decisions to the summer, but by continuing to hold our normal monthly financial meetings and companywide operations meetings and keeping our leadership thinking big picture, we ensure that the extra work going into the spring season is worthwhile and fits into our strategic plans."

"First of all, exercise. Do something: play golf, run, walk, workout. Second, every day, write down something you are grateful for at work; things are never as bad as we think they are. And lastly, meditate in the morning, using an app like Headspace to get your day off on the right foot."

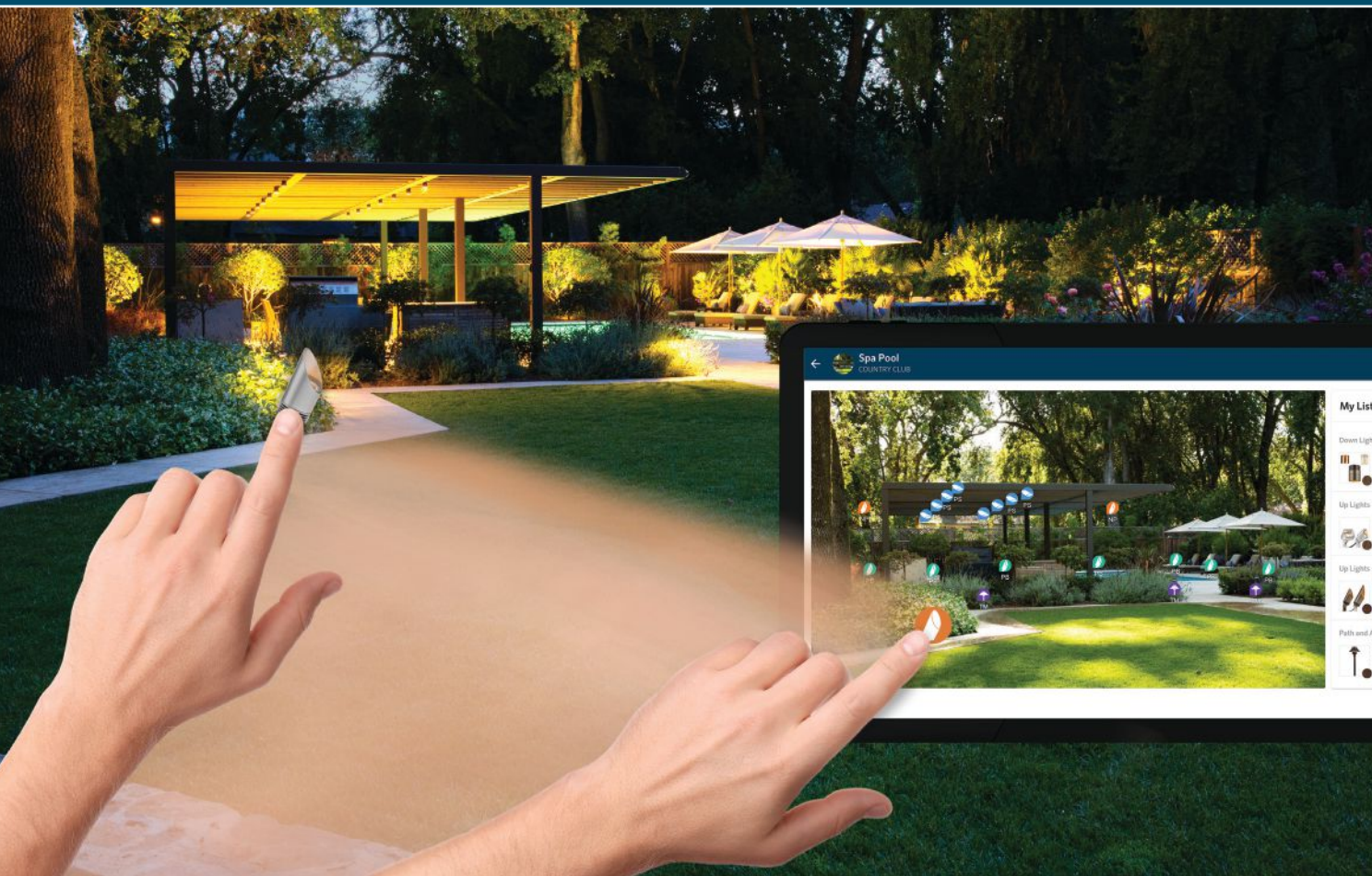


"Embrace a good time management system, such as David Allen's 'Getting Things Done.'"



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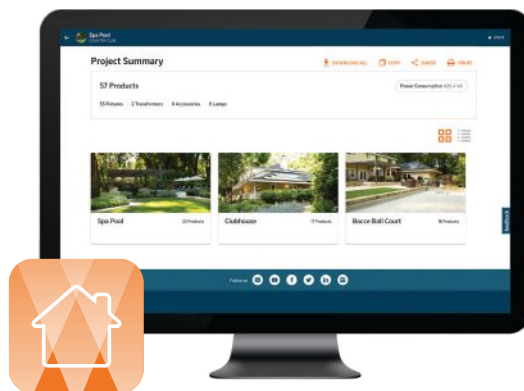
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Las Vegas proposes ban on some ornamental grasses

BY SARAH WEBB | LM MANAGING EDITOR

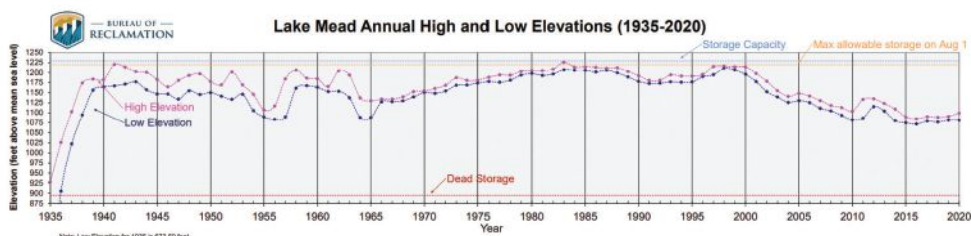
Las Vegas-area water officials have asked the Nevada Legislature to outlaw roughly 40 percent of the turf that nobody walks on, according to an *Associated Press* article.

The Southern Nevada Water Authority (SNWA) estimates there are almost 8 square miles of “nonfunctional turf” in the metro area — grass that no one ever walks on or otherwise uses in street medians, housing developments and office parks.

Ornamental grass requires as much as four times as much water as drought-tolerant landscaping like cactus and other succulents, the *Associated Press* article went on to say. By ripping it out, the SNWA estimates

the region can reduce annual water consumption by roughly 15 percent and save about 14 gallons per person per day.

The idea to ban nonessential turf stems from similar efforts in 2003, when the water authority banned



The water level of Lake Mead has dropped significantly in recent years.

SavATree continues expansion with acquisition in Michigan

SavATree expanded in Michigan by acquiring Advanced Arboriculture by Arbor-Olin of Rochester, Mich. Advanced Arboriculture is a full-service tree care company that has been serving customers for more than 40 years.

Advanced Arboriculture founder Terry Jenkinson will join the SavATree team, along with members of his staff, to ensure a seamless transition for clients.

“I’m very pleased to be joining such a successful and well-run company as SavATree,” Jenkinson said. “In addition to the excellent arboriculture customers have received, we will now offer the

following additional services: professional lawn care, deer deterrents, organic options and holiday décor.”

Schill Grounds Management acquires 2 companies

Schill Grounds Management, which is based in the Cleveland area, is expanding into the Cincinnati market with the purchase of two full-service landscaping companies.

Schill acquired Ward + Thornton Landscapes, which was founded more than 50 years ago and is based in Maineville, Ohio. Ward + Thornton provides full-service landscape, maintenance, snow management and design-

build services to numerous customers in northeast Cincinnati and beyond. In addition, Schill purchased Fredericks Landscaping, which is based in Cincinnati and has been providing full-service landscaping and snow management to customers in central Cincinnati and northern Kentucky for more than 40 years.

Schill will operate out of the existing Ward + Thornton and Fredericks facilities, while approximately 200 employees from the companies will join the Schill family. Additionally, Mike Ward, the former owner of Ward + Thornton, will oversee the consolidated operations in the region in a new role as Schill’s market president for Cincinnati.

developers from planting green front lawns in new subdivisions and offered owners of older properties rebates to tear out sod — up to \$3 per square foot for a maximum of 10,000 square feet and \$1.50 per square foot beyond 10,000 square feet, according to Steve Swanson, branch manager for the Las Vegas Valley for LandCare.

“Ripping out turf is not as prevalent in the residential side, but from the commercial side, it’s been going on for quite a while,” Swanson said. “At the end of the day, it comes down to the client on whether or not they want to take it out.”

He adds that the SNWA has released xeriscape guidelines. For example, plants that replace the turf must cover at least 50 percent of the area.

“The whole intent is to make sure we don’t create this stark dirt environment and to make sure the city still provides a lush, green look but for a fraction amount of the water used for turf,” Swanson said.


In the past several years, efforts to rip out turf are slowing. The SNWA said the number of acres converted



Xeriscape plantings such as succulents use much less water than turf, which can require three to four times as much water.

under its rebate program fell last year to six times less than what it was in 2008. Meanwhile, water consumption in southern Nevada has increased nine percent since 2019, and last year was among the driest in the region’s history when Las Vegas went a record 240 days without measurable rainfall, *AP* reported.

“If you go out to Lake Mead and look at the bathtub ring around it of water receding, it really only takes one trip to the lake to see how much it has dropped,”

Swanson said. “It’s staggering how much the water level has been drawn down in the last 20-year period. We are definitely in a drought situation, and there’s not enough snowpack in the mountains to replenish what we’re taking. As for other communities using water from Lake Mead, everyone should be looking at their water consumption and seeing what they can do to refine how they’re using it and how they can reclaim as much of it as possible.” 

NALP Legislative Days 2021 goes virtual

The 2021 National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP) Legislative Days event will be virtual.

NALP said this event is important as members help to advocate for the landscape industry to push forward policy priorities that benefit the industry.

There will be two informational briefing sessions held concurrently on June 14:

- “Climate Change and the Landscape Industry,” 2-3 p.m. EST.
- “H-2B Reform: Continuing the Fight to Overhaul the H-2B Program in the 117th Congress,” 2-3 p.m. EST.

Virtual meetings with members of congress will be scheduled from June 14-25. NALP will

provide background information and handouts on issues critical to the landscaping industry. Members are encouraged to register online by May 28 for this free event in order to schedule meetings with Congressional representatives.

Court upholds Evans Landscaping convictions

The U.S. Sixth Circuit Court of Appeals issued a ruling affirming the convictions of Cincinnati businessman Doug Evans and his landscaping company, according to a release from the U.S. Department of Justice.

Evans and Evans Landscaping were tried and convicted in December 2018 of two counts of conspiracy to commit wire

fraud and three counts of wire fraud arising out of their scheme to secure government contracts through a shell company. After four weeks at trial, the defendant and his company were found guilty on all counts and convicted of defrauding the city of Cincinnati and other public entities by fraudulently obtaining contracts reserved for small and minority businesses.

In January 2020, Evans was sentenced to 21 months in prison. Evans Landscaping was ordered to pay \$500,000 in fines. In his appeal, Evans challenged the denial of his motion to suppress evidence, the District Court’s handling of various trial issues and the jury instructions provided at the end of the trial.

WE'VE MADE IT,



FOCUSED ON SOLUTIONS Pam Dooley (center), owner of Plants Creative of Scottdale, Ga., says having employees like Maka Provost (left) and Hollie Arnold (right) engage with clients has made a big difference for her business.

AND SO CAN YOU

Female industry insiders share keys to success, how to make a business stand out, recruitment best practices and more

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

Being a woman in the landscape industry now is different from what it was like when Deborah Cole started in the industry in the 1980s, but something that hasn't changed is the endless possibilities.

It's just a little bit easier to see them in 2021 than it was in 1981.

Cole, founder and former president of Greater Texas Landscape Services in Austin, Texas, along with Pam Dooley, owner, Plants Creative in Scottsdale, Ga., Callan Dudley, general manager of Southern Landscape Group in Evington, Va., and Amber Fox, director of human resources at Grunder Landscaping Co. in Miamisburg, Ohio, share the lessons they've learned along the way in their careers and how women — and men — can join the thriving green industry.

DETERMINED TO SUCCEED

Cole has had a front seat to watch the industry transform in her 35 years in the green industry.

Cole helped grow Greater Texas Landscape into a \$68.5 million business, which came in at No. 23 on the 2018 LM150 list of the largest landscape companies before BrightView acquired it in 2018.

Cole didn't know much about landscape companies when she graduated with her master's degree in landscape horticulture from Texas A&M, but when a friend approached her to start a business, she jumped in headfirst.

"Landscaping is an art and a science," Cole says. "Over time, I realized that I had the art down, I had the science down, but I had no business expertise other than a good gut instinct. I didn't have any people training. It was not on my radar to own a business, but once the opportunity came, I'm always a big yes person."

When her business partner parted ways after three years, Cole was on her own but determined to succeed.

"I never felt 'I can't do this,'" she says. "I never felt like this is something only for a man. I never, ever,

ever had that feeling. My attitude was, I'm going to show up the way I am and do the best I can and not worry about other people."

She says she experienced isolation when she attended her first Associated Landscape Contractors of America meeting. The association is now the National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP). She says she walked into a room of all men, and she knew she stood out.

"That was the first time I ever felt that there was something a little different," she says. "It's not that they did anything to make me feel that way. It's just little groups of men talking to each other, nobody particularly welcoming."

Cole says one key to her success is always believing in herself and never allowing her gender to influence her self-worth as a business owner. She also says it was important for her to seek out education in the areas where she needed it.

"When we got into the maintenance side of the business, I thought, 'I don't know anything about lawn mowers,'" she recalls. "So, I signed up for a lawn mower repair class. When I decided we need to buy some skid-steer loaders, I took a skid-steer operator licensing class."

Cole says one regret she has during her time in the green industry is not taking an active role at the national level with industry organizations. While involved at the state level with Texas Nursery & Landscape Association, she never took the



“

When you walk into a room of people that you don't feel worthy of, just stop it.”

— DEBORAH COLE

Continued on page 14



PHOTO: PLANTS CREATIVE



“
In a male-dominated industry, you have to have that respect and build strong relationships.”

— CALLAN DUDLEY

Continued from page 13

opportunity to serve on a national committee despite being asked. That's why Cole says she's such a big proponent of NALP's Women in Landscaping Facebook group. She is proud of how the group has grown into a network of industry allies.

"I thought, 'There's no excuse not to succeed 30 years ago, (but) now, there's really no excuse because there is the support,'" she says.

To other women in the green industry, Cole shares this advice: "Don't let yourself feel less than. There's absolutely no reason. When you walk into a room of people that you don't feel worthy of, just stop it. Stop it right there."

RELATIONSHIPS MATTER

An accountant at heart, Callan Dudley was recently promoted from accountant to general manager of Southern Landscape Group in Evinston, Va. Southern Landscape Group provides lawn care, maintenance, lighting and design/build services for 80 percent residential and 20 percent commercial clients.

Dudley says the NALP Women in Leadership Facebook group and Southern Landscape's peer group have become vital parts of her success.

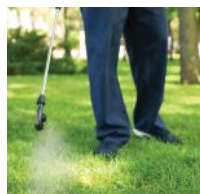
"I've grown in my career 10 times over in the last month or so due to some unforeseen circumstances," she says. "This industry is the most giving, friendly environment that I think I could ever be in. I know if I reached out to anyone in the (Facebook) group, they would get back to me."

She says having a solid relationship with Southern Landscape Group's owner and President Mark Maslow and industry peers have helped her succeed.

Dudley says work/life balance is a challenge for many professionals. She's determined to master it. She's also grateful that family time is a part of Southern Landscape's culture.

"Family is extremely important to me, as well as my success in my career," she says. "I will do whatever it takes to keep the balance and be successful in both aspects. It's all about creating expectations. Of course, things are going to pop up. It might be a client emergency that needs attention, and we handle it, but at

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the same time, we're all trying to have a good work/life balance, separating from work when we are home."

A source of pride for Dudley is seeing her employees succeed. A long-time employee, Liz Maddox, was recently promoted to landscape management production manager and has taken the role head-on.

"She knows all of her clients, she knows how to run our equipment and she's running that division and is doing a hell of a job," Dudley says. "It's a big deal because she has earned that respect. She has that relationship with her team members. That's why she's so successful. In a male-dominated industry, you have to have that respect and build strong relationships."

FIND YOUR NICHE

"This is an amazing industry, but the work we do is pretty similar," says Pam Dooley, owner of Plants Creative Landscapes in Scottdale, Ga. "We take care of lawns. We take care of plants. We build amazing spaces. There are thousands and thousands of companies doing it."

Dooley encourages landscape business owners to set their businesses apart from their competitors by finding a different way to do something and then run with it. Plants Creative offers residential landscape design/build, irrigation and maintenance services in the Atlanta area—a competitive market. To differentiate itself among competitors, Dooley put an emphasis on relationships and employees who are engaged with clients.

"They attract customers who value service over price and team members who are creative, outside-the-box solutions providers," she says.

Dooley is also a strong proponent of servant leadership. Key traits of her leadership style are her generosity and empathy. She says her employees have responded to this part of the culture at Plants Creative.

"When you show up in service of (employees), it is well received by others," she says.

As critical as it is to develop a servant leadership culture, Dooley says she believes it's also important to have a solid leadership team that balances her strengths to make the company stronger as a whole.

"Having people in your com-

pany who complement and hold you accountable to those weaknesses is so important," she says.

Continued on page 16

Data from 2020 from the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics shows women make up **8.8 percent** of the landscaping workforce, which is down from **10.6 percent** in 2018.



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“

When you show up in service of (employees), it is well received by others.”

— PAM DOOLEY

Continued from page 15

Dooley says one of her weaknesses was her lack of focus on the financial side of her business. This became clear to her when industry consultant and *LM* columnist Jeffrey Scott asked her, “How are your numbers?” Dooley replied, “I have no idea ... I mean, they’re fine.”

Scott told her if that was her answer, her numbers likely were not fine. Dooley has since joined one of Scott’s peer groups. Since then, she realized that while her strength in horticulture helped catapult the business in the beginning, paying attention to her firm’s financials has helped Plants Creative experience double-digit growth.

“That was a huge turning point for me and my business maturity,” she says. “I am so growth-minded. I love growing top-line revenue, but I’ve also matured into, ‘OK, let’s just really focus on the smallest pennies so that we can also impact our bottom line.’”

OPPORTUNITIES AROUND

Amber Fox, director of human resources at Grunder Landscaping Co. in Miamisburg, Ohio, says the green industry found her, and not the other way around. She joined the company as the “director of first impressions,” an administrative assistant position, and she has helped Grunder Landscaping perfect its approach to hiring in her current role.

Continued on page 18

Survey says

When asked about having a diverse workforce, respondents to our 2020 *LM* Industry Pulse overwhelmingly said women and diverse workforces were already a part of their employment practices.

“We hired more female workers this year than ever before,” says an owner of a full-service company in the Northeast

“Our current workforce is 13 percent female,” says an owner of a design/build company in the Midwest.

“I am a female sole-proprietor owner/operator. I encourage other women to participate in the industry,” says an irrigation company owner in the West.



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“

There are a ton of opportunities in this industry for anyone who wants them.”

— AMBER FOX

Continued from page 16

Fox says all team members want to work for a company that is transparent and shows it cares about them as people first and team members second. Grunder Landscaping, which provides landscaping, hardscaping, and maintenance services for 60 percent residential and 40 percent commercial clientele, aims to do just that.

“Our mission statement and our core values are very important here,” she says. “We focus a lot on just being a team.”

Fox says it’s a challenge to find good team members, and Grunder Landscaping puts an emphasis on how the candidate fits with the company culture.

“You have to stay true to your hiring practices and your core values,” she says. “I always tell (the managers) not to settle.”


Fox says there are so

many opportunities for women and men of all backgrounds in the green industry. She says those aspiring to enter the industry should recognize all the potential avenues to explore, and she says it’s OK if a candidate doesn’t know exactly where the green industry will take them.

“If you’re not sure if you like maintenance or if you like design, interview the company,” she says. “It’s not just about the company interviewing you. You have to make sure that

the company is a good fit for you. Find someone willing to help you grow into that ideal position that you want.”

She says she’s excited to see so many more women in the industry now in many different roles, and she hopes this continues.

“There are a ton of opportunities in this industry for anyone who wants them,” she says. 

Data from McKinsey & Co. in 2017 shows companies in the top quartile for gender diversity were **21 percent more likely to experience above-average profitability.**



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Participants in the National Association of Landscape Professionals' Landscape Management Apprenticeship Program share lessons learned and why personal development for employees is important

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR
AND SARAH WEBB | LM MANAGING EDITOR

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

When Environmental Enhancements in Sterling, Va., decided to offer the National Association of Landscape Professionals' (NALP) Landscape Management Apprenticeship Program to its employees, the company took a careful approach to find candidates to be a part of this opportunity. The company provides commercial landscape management, design/installation, irrigation, organic pest control and snow and ice services.

NALP began offering the apprenticeship program, which is registered by the U.S. Department of Labor, in 2019. NALP developed this program to establish the landscape profession as a skilled trade. The association says it opens doors for recruitment through high school counselors, veterans' groups and community workforce boards.

Companies must be in business for a year to be eligible to participate and pay a \$500 enrollment fee and \$100 per apprentice for NALP members. Optional training per apprentice is \$737 for three online courses, and apprentices who do not complete the program in two years will need to pay a \$50 holdover fee.

Carmen Kesteven, HR manager with Environmen-

tal Enhancements, says companies considering offering the apprenticeship program need to understand there are some basic requirements of all potential apprentices. This includes a high school diploma or GED certificate. Kesteven also asks applicants to provide a resume, another step to establish the program as one for professional development, something she says is important to the company.

"To us, it was really an opportunity to have trained, certified employees," she says. "If we can present this as an opportunity, as an incentive for a career path for any employee, this gives them the opportunity to better themselves."

A crucial part of the success of the apprenticeship program is finding the right mentor to help your employee navigate through the program.

"Not everyone is a mentor, no matter how long you have been working for the industry," she says. "Not everyone can coach. In order to be a great mentor, you have to know how to coach."

Kesteven says it's important to recognize this program is also a major time commitment for the apprentice as the program can take up to two years to complete. The Landscape Management

Apprenticeship Program has 17 steps with about 2,000 hours total of training, including 144 hours of online education and testing. Program participants can apply up to 1,000 hours of experience and knowledge to the program. Kesteven says Environmental Enhancements will provide computer access for employees who may need it.

"I believe the owner of the company smiles every time that someone says, 'I would like to do this,'" she says. "Because he does believe in self-improvement; he believes in professional growth."

Environmental Enhancement considers motivated and organized apprentice candidates who have worked for the company for at least six months and meet the company's basic criteria of a resume and a high school diploma or GED certificate. All apprentice candidates must be eligible to work in the U.S., pass a substance abuse screening and be able to perform the duties of a landscape professional.

"You cannot just put someone in because you feel like it or because that person wants it," she says. "It's a commitment on the apprentice. It's a commitment on the mentor.

BOOTS ON THE GROUND
Eichenlaub apprentice Megan Wolfgang performs landscape maintenance.



Carmen Kesteven



COMPLETED
Hector Marin,
Environmental
Enhancements
IPM manager,
with his U.S.
Department
of Labor
certificate.

It's a commitment on the company and the program administrator. It is not a given."

Environmental Enhancements offers wage increases as employees complete each of the 17 steps to reward and encourage employees going through the program.

"You're presenting something visible, something that they can see and something they will be obtaining as they move through the program," she says.

Hector Marin, IPM manager for Environmental Enhancements, was the company's first apprentice, and Kesteven says it was a source of pride for him to complete the program. Kesteven strongly encourages companies to start with one or two employees at a time to set up participants and the company for success.

"Know what you need," she says. "Have the right people in place. Commit to it, fulfill that commitment and always be there to help your apprentice. And also, this will tell you how well you know your people."

BUILDING TOWARD TOMORROW

How Eichenlaub got its apprenticeship program up and running

Eichenlaub launched its apprenticeship program about two years ago as part of its effort to recruit people to its team and entice people to the landscape industry.

"We felt this was a good avenue to get people interested who might not be certain about the green industry," says Angela Barr, director of administration at Eichenlaub, a design/build, irrigation and maintenance firm in Pittsburgh. "It's another tool for building up the team and getting people interested in changing the negative thought that landscaping is just a person mowing grass. In reality, there are a lot more opportunities within the green industry than just a guy with a pickup truck."

So far, Eichenlaub has had two apprentices go through the Landscape Management Apprenticeship Program, sponsored by the National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP). The estimated timeline for apprenticeships is from about a year to a year and a half.

"The overall goal is for them to have a better understanding of the depth of the landscape industry," Barr says. "It's a great way they can work and earn a wage while also having this opportunity to learn and better understand where their preferences are and where they might like to

Continued on page 22

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Continued from page 21
work in the future.”

Barr says NALP has also served as a resource to get the program up and running.

“NALP puts together a great program that hits on a lot of facets, and I think it’s up to the individual company to train and teach those in their program,” Barr says. “NALP is always willing to help you out no matter the question and push you in the right direction to get the answer for you. It’s great to have a national association that’s willing to do as much as it does to help companies get this type of program started.”

Throughout the program, apprentices work in tandem with the company’s various crews and with the staff development coordinator.

“They’re in the trenches with irrigation systems, understanding how those work, getting exposure to smart systems with the planting department,” Barr says. “They are working with the landscape management department, understanding fertilizer calibration and learning best practices for mowing and weeding.”


Barr says recent high school graduates who are proactive and who maintain a positive attitude are the type of candidates Eichenlaub seeks as apprentices.

“The more that they’re putting into it, the more questions they’re asking, the more they’re taking advantage of the opportunities that are put forth to them, the more productive and beneficial the apprenticeship will be for them,” Barr says.

Barr recommends communicating with high schools via email and in person, if possible, through open houses about the apprenticeship programs to generate interest.

“I think the biggest thing is getting it out to the high schools, the guidance counselors, in front of the parents, because they’re going to be some of the biggest influencers in the decision process,” Barr says. “It’s more so of an education process at this point; we’re just making people aware of the program. With Pittsburgh being a steel town, people understand the word apprenticeship. We’re just applying it to another industry.”

For companies looking to incorporate an apprenticeship program, Barr suggests leaning on a fellow landscape company who has already gone through the process.

“We’ve learned a lot here with getting individuals through the apprenticeship program, and we’re able to determine how we need to make adjustments to make it a more seamless process,” she says. 



GOT IT DONE Zachary Pulcini and Megan Wolfgang of Eichenlaub show off apprenticeship certificates.



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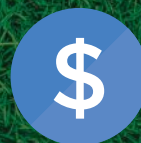
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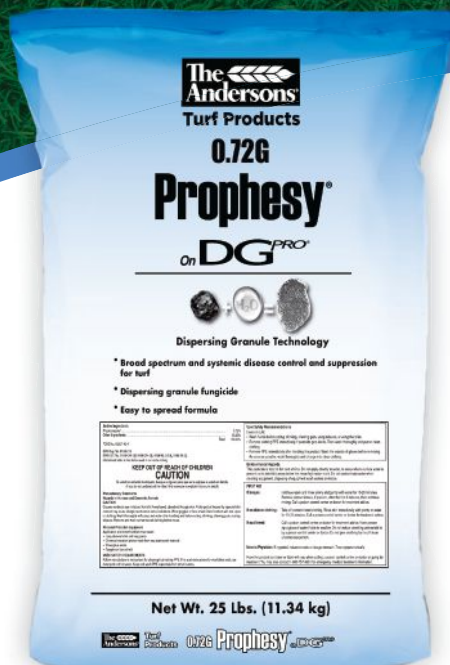
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WEED AVENGERS

How to manage nutsedge

LCOs share do's and don'ts for controlling this pesky weed BY LAUREN DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR

If customers complain about a quick-growing weed that's towering over the rest of their turf, they might have nutsedge in their lawns.

Properly identifying and treating this aggressive weed are the keys to successfully managing it, as two lawn care operators (LCOs) share.

HOW TO IDENTIFY

Nutsedge has a lime-green color and grows about twice as fast as regular grass. Its blades are also thinner than those on other grasses, with a triangular stem.

Adam Linnemann, owner of Linnemann Lawn Care & Landscaping, says his customers often refer to nutsedge as water grass. His team will ask the client to describe the color, how quickly it grows or send a photo to confirm it's nutsedge. Years of experience have been the biggest help with identifying the weed, he says.

Linnemann Lawn Care & Landscaping provides landscape, hardscape, lawn care, lighting and snow removal services throughout the eastern St. Louis metro area, on the Missouri-Illinois line. Its customers are 80 percent residential and

20 percent commercial, and the company has an annual revenue of \$1.2 million.

WHEN TO APPLY HERBICIDES

Nutsedge control is included in Linnemann's lawn care program because of its prevalence in the area. The company applies FMC's Dismiss NXT herbicide, which includes the active ingredients sulfentrazone and carfentrazone-ethyl, as soon as nutsedge appears, generally between June and August. Linnemann appreciates the quick results.

"The main reason we like it is that two days after spraying, the nutsedge is already dying," Linnemann says. "That's good for us and the homeowner."

Jeffrey Juchnowicz, president of Terra Garden Solutions in Naples, Fla., battles both nutsedge and kyllinga, which produces nutsedge seed heads and is more difficult to manage. So, he turned to a product that treats both.

His company applies PBI-Gordon's Vexis granular herbicide six to 10 times a year, depending on the lawn's needs. "It doesn't stunt turf like other herbicides," Juchnowicz says. Vexis features the active ingredient pyrimisulfan.

Terra Garden Solutions provides lawn care and pest control services to an even mix of residential and commercial properties. The company has an annual revenue of \$3 million.

BEST CULTURAL PRACTICES

In addition to applying herbicides, keeping a thick lawn and avoiding bare spots help prevent nutsedge.

LCOs also should ensure there aren't low spots or other areas that hold water.

"We see it more if the lawn doesn't drain well," Linnemann says. His technicians instruct customers not to walk on the treated area until it dries and to avoid mowing for one to two days after the application.

Preventing severe lawn conditions like excessively wet or dry areas also helps, Juchnowicz says. Mowing more often has also helped his team reduce occurrences.

"You'll notice that when you have areas on the property like a drainage ditch, side yard or backyard with drought damage, these are the areas that will have nutsedge first," Juchnowicz says. "Once it gets into an area, it spreads into a circular-type pattern."

MISTAKES TO AVOID

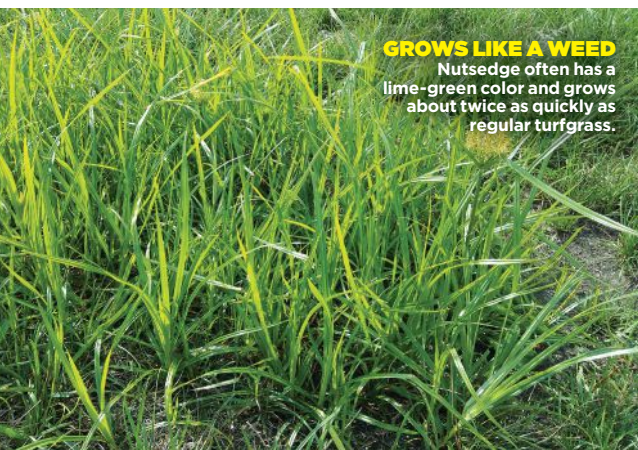
Be cautious if mixing herbicides, like a broadleaf and sedge herbicide, for example, Juchnowicz says. If herbicides are improperly mixed, the chemicals can cause more turf injury than if applied separately.

Also, Juchnowicz says it's important not to rely too heavily on a single herbicide. LCOs need to give systemic products time to work.

"Don't put all of your eggs in one basket with herbicides," he says, noting replacing the initial product with another herbicide too early could lead to a reduction in its efficacy.

"Don't treat sedge as a short-term issue," Juchnowicz says. "It spreads, and it's one of the tougher weeds to get rid of. Be diligent to recognize when it's starting to germinate and give it a week or two after it germinates before treating to get a consistent spray." 📷

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Nashville.



GROWS LIKE A WEED
Nutsedge often has a lime-green color and grows about twice as quickly as regular turfgrass.

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PROTECT YOUR TURF

HEAT LOVER

Heat and moisture can contribute to the fungus behind large patch and brown patch.



How to spot brown and large patch

Brown and large patch are common turf diseases that are easier for LCOs to prevent than they are to control BY EMILY SCHAPPACHER | LM CONTRIBUTOR



Every spring, after three or four humid 85-degree F days, Branden Rheinschmidt knows brown patch will be a problem for nearly all his clients.

"Here, 99 percent of fescue yards will get brown patch sometime between May 1 and May 15," says Rheinschmidt, owner of FineTurf in Charlotte, N.C. "You can almost pinpoint when it will start."

In April, Rheinschmidt sends a newsletter to his customers offering them a preventive program to keep the disease at bay. About half of his customers sign up for it. The other half will likely see irregularly shaped brown patches throughout their lawns until the fall when temperatures cool and the turf can recover.

"Brown patch is much easier to prevent than it is to control," Rheinschmidt says. "Fescue doesn't grow at 85 degrees F, so once the lawn has the disease, the damage is done."

The combination of heat and moisture is the perfect breeding ground for *Rhizoctonia solani*, the fungus responsible for brown and large patch, although different strains of the fungus are responsible for each disease. Brown patch strains are specific to cool-season grasses and are most active in spring and summer during warm, humid conditions. Large patch strains are specific to warm-season grasses and cause disease when temperatures are cooler in the fall and spring.

These diseases affect the turf's leaves and leaf sheaths, causing irregular tan, yellow or brown patches that can measure anywhere from 6 inches to 3 feet in diameter. Leaves affected with brown or large patch are easily pulled off the stem.

"Although unsightly, it does not typically kill the turf," says Ian Rodriguez, Ph.D., technical services manager for Quali-Pro. "Avoiding excess irrigation and soluble N applications during peak conditions will go a long way in preventing the disease. If curative measures are needed, most turf-labeled fungicides cover brown and large patch."

PATCH PREVENTION


To prevent brown patch, Rheinschmidt applies azoxystrobin in the spring before the disease appears and then every 21 to 28 days throughout the summer. This program almost always prevents brown patch from appearing, Rheinschmidt says, although there can be an occasional breakthrough if rain washes the product away before it can work or if a lawn is mowed too soon after the

fungicide application. He adds that most of his customers who forgo the preventive program in the spring are likely to sign up for it the following year once they see the disease take hold.

Lane Tredway, Ph.D., technical services manager for Syngenta, agrees that a preventive approach is best when it comes to brown and large patch. Brown patch applications should be initiated in the spring to early summer, when nighttime air temperatures are consistently above 60 degrees F. Large patch applications should be initiated in late summer to fall, when soil temperatures are below 70 degrees F.

"Both diseases attack when turf is growing slowly, so recovery from damage can take weeks or months," Tredway says. "LCOs should initiate preventive applications when weather conditions become conducive to infection."

Rheinschmidt advises LCOs to train applicators, as well as homeowners, to properly identify patch diseases to help stay ahead of the problem. He says sometimes patch diseases can look similar to the damage caused by dog urine or by scalping a lawn. Rheinschmidt sees brown patch most often in turf that is stressed by dry, hot conditions, rather than in shaded areas that are better protected from the heat.

"Because most diseases are weather-related, they are pretty predictable," he says. "Be on the lookout. If you catch it early enough, the damage isn't as bad." 

Schappacher is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.

TREAT IT EARLY

Recovery from brown patch and large patch can take months, so it's important to spot symptoms early.



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BUSINESS BOOSTERS

Partnered up

Experts explain how joining forces with a distributor can help increase efficiency and productivity **BY SARAH WEBB | LM MANAGING EDITOR**

Building a relationship with knowledgeable distributors can help landscape companies increase their productivity and efficiency and, in turn, grow their companies.

“Our customers’ success determines our success, so we work to provide all the tools needed to grow their business, not just the products,” says SiteOne Sr. Manager of Customer Experience Pooja Watson. “From the associates in our branches to our online service tools, we seek to be our customers’ expanded team.”

Industry professionals explain how landscape companies can settle on a distributor and maintain a healthy relationship in the long run.

WHY TEAM UP?

Working with a distributor will not only help landscape pros select the right products for their projects and jobs, but it also provides them with industry expertise and knowledge, according to Jack York, national irrigation product manager for Ewing.

“Industry distributors focus on the professional contractor and their needs, prioritizing the B2B relationship,” York says. “By partnering with a distributor, contractors have the added benefit of leveraging the relationships their supplier has with manufacturers for product support and troubleshooting.”

Mary Martinez, director of marketing at Horizon, adds that distributors can help contractors manage

the ins and outs of their day-to-day business.

“It’s about being able to ask things like, ‘Last year, you bought your fertilizer at this time of year, do you want to preorder it again now?’” Martinez says. “By having a close relationship with your distributor, you can work with them and make sure that your upcoming jobs are being ordered for. If you were jumping around and buying all your product based on price, you’re not going to have that close relationship, and you might find yourself a little short.”

Lincoln Weis, owner of Just Dig It in Kennesaw, Ga., who uses SiteOne as his distributor, notes that it’s also important for distributors to be knowledgeable and invested in the product they’re selling.

“I know I can call anyone in the branch that I go to, and they’ll give me an answer to my question,” Weis says. “They understand the plant material, and they know when it’s coming in. It takes a lot of experience and years to get to that point to be able to do that. I can ask my distributor’s rep about the nuances of plants, and that helps me make my designs and projects better.”

WHAT TO LOOK FOR

Key components to look for in a distributor include convenient locations and shopping methods, whether it keeps the right products in stock when landscape pros need them and excellent customer service. Other resources a distributor can offer include training and education classes, troubleshooting support and knowledgeable branch staff.

“When selecting a distributor, consider that decision as selecting a business partner,” York says. “A strong distributor relationship can be instrumental in your business’ long-term growth and success. If you can find a partner that

Continued on page 30

GET WHAT YOU NEED
Partnering with distributors can save time on shopping around for materials.



PHOTO: HORIZON DISTRIBUTORS

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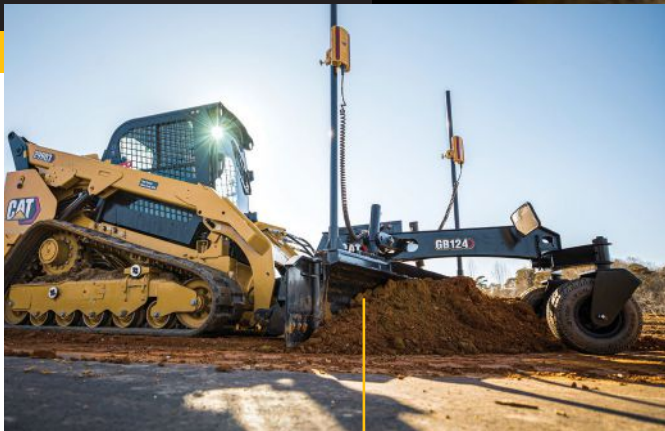
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BUSINESS BOOSTERS

Continued from page 28

not only meets your product needs but also provides you value-added services to help you work on the business, that relationship will last beyond this season or year and well into years of success for your business.”

He recommends checking a potential distributor partner’s inventory levels, asking about how staff communicates with customers on price and inventory changes, comparing payment, credit and rebate terms and learning about any additional value-added services it may offer, such as discounted delivery fees, loyalty programs and education classes.

Martinez adds that local associations are also a good place to start to find a reliable distributor.

To maintain a working relationship with their distributor, Martinez recommends that landscape contractors be transparent about their businesses.

“If you share that you have jobs coming up or that you’ve just expanded your business, the distributor can help you plan your product buys to make sure that you can keep your cash flow going in

the back end and make sure that they stock enough in case you suddenly have an increase in jobs or in business,” she says. “If you communicate that, you can work together and make sure you have the products you need to get your job done every day.”

THE PERKS
Perks of partnering with distributors include discounted delivery fees, loyalty programs and more.



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THE BIG ONE

3 cheers for color

LOCATION Milwaukee

COMPANY David J. Frank Landscape Contracting

DETAILS This client is a major restaurant group with eight multilevel cafes in southeastern Wisconsin. David J. Frank Landscape Contracting manages the properties and installs more than 1,600 plants in 60 planters across the properties.

The client is a unique challenge for account manager Meridith Wagner, whose brother owns the restaurant group.

The site's challenges include installing seasonal flowers on multiple floors of the properties, a shortened growing season and the need to select plants that are less attractive to pollinators. Wagner says she uses colorful vegetation, begonias, coleus and some tropical plants.

Wagner says her brother likes to have planters with full plants immediately, so Wagner and team use New-Pro planters with removable inserts. Grower partners fill the planters, and crews install them in early May.

"We don't make a mess while we're there," she says. "Because the plants are a lot bigger, by the time we install, nothing has really died off because of a spring cold night."

Crews have to carry everything they need to service the multilevels through the buildings. Patios open at 8 a.m., so crews work early hours.

This project earned David J. Frank a 2020 Bronze Award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence program.

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



PHOTOS: DAVID J. FRANK LANDSCAPE CONTRACTING



Captions | 1. Several of the properties include multiple levels. 2. Dragon Wing begonias, Mammy croton and ivy create a vibrant combination at the entrance to this site. 3. Crews transport materials through the restaurants discreetly and carry everything to the patios on the upper levels at all eight locations. 4. This inviting tropical beer garden is a great place to enjoy a cold Schofferhofer hefeweizen beer among the schefflera. 5. This 24-inch planter with begonias makes a bold statement on the patio. 6. The colorful curb appeal created by the David J. Frank team is hard to miss and plays a key role in attracting customers and branding the client's cafés. 7. The client's goal for this property was to create a feeling of "gezellig," the Dutch word for an inviting atmosphere. David J. Frank uses colorful vegetation, begonias, coleus, schefflera, crotons and philodendrons.

Water is gold

Why (and how) landscapers should focus on water management



Once known as the outdoor plumbers of the industry, the role of an irrigator has now moved in-house for most landscape professionals. But, for many, that's where the evolution stopped, with these pros settling for sprinkler repairs and other rudimentary water fixes.

Yet, with the price of water and labor on the rise and the cost of technology decreasing, it's time for landscapers to take the next step to make water management a priority — and a profitable one at that.

Two of Weathermatic's Premier Partners share why water management is critical for success and also how they've implemented it into their services.

Why water management matters

With the cost of water rising, water conservation is not only the environmentally conscious solution, but it's now also one of the largest returns on investment opportunities in commercial landscaping.



Bob Grover

“If you think you don't need to manage water, it's going to catch up to you. We try to be as forward-thinking as possible,” Grover says. “Technology is constantly changing across all industries, and landscaping and irrigation are no different.”

Even with those facts, there's still been pushback to move forward, says Bob Grover, president of Pacific Landscape Management, which services commercial and HOA properties.

While his markets — Portland, Ore., and Vancouver, Wash. — are known for rainy weather from fall until spring, summers are very dry. As water has been the fastest growing utility expense, water management has become a big focus for them during the past decade. They currently have 450 of Weathermatic's smart controllers across their properties.

“It might rain today and be really dry tomorrow,” Grover says. “We can't go to the site and constantly be programming. The weather-based irrigation controller does that for us automatically.”

Even professionals in areas known for dry weather — like Scott Needham, president of ProQual Landscaping in Tempe, Ariz. — have seen resistance.

“One thing I heard a lot was, ‘I've been doing this for 30 years. Why should I change?’” Needham says. “Everything else in the world is changing. Why would it not change for our businesses, as well? It's been a huge differentiator for us and our growth through the years.”

Benefits on both sides

One of the main reasons professionals are reluctant to add water management services is because they're worried customers won't pay for it. That's simply not the case, as these two owners can attest.

“Just like our customers want to manage their electric or natural gas utilities, water is also a utility. If it isn't saved properly, it will cost them money,” Grover says. “Also, if the irrigation is going off when it's raining, people are very sensitive to that. They think you're not managing things properly.”

Needham's company currently manages 85 large-scale HOA communities, and all of them have been converted

to smart water technology. With thousands of controllers throughout their portfolio, adjusting all of them on a regular basis would be impossible. Now, they can control them anywhere they have Internet access.

After installing their first weather-based controller, Needham says he realized this was going to be a big part of their future. The customers experience lower water bills, and his company benefits from the convenience of controlling the systems remotely. Not only that, but this technology also helps prevent the No. 1 killer of landscaping: overwatering.



Scott Needham

How to price

Figuring out how to charge customers for water management is the next step with capitalizing on this service.

Needham provides the service to all of his customers as part of his landscape management package, and he says big contracts have started requiring water management — putting them one step ahead of

companies that aren't already experienced with the service.

"We believe it's so important that we just made it standard practice and built it into our pricing model," Needham says.

Conversely, Pacific Landscape Management customers are given the choice to sign up for water management services. Those who do pay an additional monthly fee — just like the monthly fee Grover pays to use Weathermatic's system. The monthly subscription model has been a big selling point, as it does not require customers to pay a larger initial fee to set up the system like they did in the past.



Weathermatic Premier Partners receive training, sales and marketing resources, such as custom designed marketing literature.



Forming a partnership

Making this service possible, efficient and profitable for companies is the technology behind it. Both Grover and Needham turned to Weathermatic's products and Premier Partner program for support with training, marketing, sales and other resources.

"I felt like their team, customer support and management mindset really aligned with our values," Needham says.

Weathermatic's cloud-based irrigation system keeps controls online and active, according to both owners. The controller adjusts the amount of water applied daily based on factors like temperature, humidity, slope, plant/soil type and sprinkler type. It can be customized to each site, making it truly a smart and effective product.

"We strive to be the leader in our industry," Needham says. "I feel like water management has helped us do that."



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SCAN ME

MAINTENANCE SHOP

Keep your fleet mowing

Experts share tips to keep zero-turn mowers running their best during this busy season

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

Spring is in full swing, and crews may wonder if it's important to take the time to perform routine maintenance on zero-turn mowers while they're so busy. The answer is yes.

"A lot of people will wait until something turns up before they fix it, and that's downtime," says Darren Terry, owner of Nolin Lawn Service in Clarkson, Ky. "I like to get something fixed as soon as something's worn out. If you tear something up, it's a day's downtime for somebody."

LM talked with Terry; Brian Schoenthaler, marketing coordinator for The Grasshopper Co.; Brad

Unruh, director of new product development for Hustler Turf Equipment, and Sean Dwyer, North America professional wheeled product manager for Husqvarna, to get the rundown on zero-turn maintenance.

IN SEASON

It's a good idea to start the day with a quick check of the mower, Unruh says, to make sure gas and oil levels look good, the decks are clear, air filters are clean, blades are sharp and tire pressure is good to go.

"This not only guarantees a productive day, but it also adds to the longevity of the mower," he says.

Terry, whose operation provides mowing services for residential clients, says he rotates mowers once a week among his three part-time employees.

"If I'm riding my mower all day every day, and if anything starts to go out slowly, I can't tell it because I'm on it all the time," he says. "If you get on my mower, you'll be able to tell if something's wrong with it real quick if you get on it."

Terry also makes it a point to have his crew keep mower decks and radiators clean. Every night, he'll also inspect his company's four mowers and wash them on the weekend. He says this attention to detail is how his mowers, which range from 900 hours to 3,000 hours, keep running smoothly.

Dwyer encourages operators to keep an ear out for "strange noises" or "weird operation" that can help address any mower maintenance issues sooner than later. Schoenthaler advises contractors to stay on top of regular maintenance intervals, following manufacturers' recommendations.

"Every 100 hours, change the engine oil and filter," he says. "In severe conditions, change them every 50 hours. Check and clean spark plugs and inspect belts for proper tension. Adjust the tension and/or replace belts as necessary."

Schoenthaler also suggests operators avoid high-pressure water or steam when cleaning the mower's drive and engine components because pres-

sure washing can cause water to bypass seals and cause rust.

"Mowers are working in a dirty, dusty and hostile environment," he says. "Heat is your enemy. Keeping the mower clean will extend the life expectancy of your mower."


DON'T FORGET

Dwyer says one thing contractors may miss checking is the cutting deck level and pitch.

"Most cutting decks require a forward pitch of 1/4 inch to 3/8 inch to ensure efficient operation and best cut quality," he says. "Over time, the deck pitch and level can go out of alignment. If the deck ends up in a reverse pitch situation (higher in front), the cutting deck is doing twice the work, so you are adding more stress to the engine, belts and clutch."

Unruh says it's important to ensure that a mower's hydrostatic transmission system runs properly.

Schoenthaler adds that operators should scout for unsafe areas before mowing for safety's sake. He also encourages contractors to use the original equipment manufacturer's parts when servicing zero-turn mowers.

"Don't cut corners on quality," he says. "Saving a few dollars here and there on aftermarket parts may shorten the life of your mower and, in some cases, void your warranty. Original equipment parts are manufactured to the manufacturer's precise engineering specifications to help maximize your mower's performance and significantly extend the life of your mower." 

KEEP IT CLEAN
Routine maintenance helps ensure crews experience less downtime in the field.



Brian Schoenthaler



Darren Terry



Brad Unruh



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SOFTWARE UPDATE

How software produces results

A look at the benefits three companies have seen from implementing landscape industry software

**BY LAUREN DOWDLE
CONTRIBUTOR**

PROJECT SCHEDULER

Clarke Ramsey, president of Le Perv Landscape in San Diego, currently has 15 crews using the scheduling software Crew Control. The company offers lawn care, landscape maintenance, landscape construction and irrigation services to an even mix of commercial and residential customers. The company has an annual revenue of \$2.5 million.

To get information about their next job, crews receive a text message with a link instead of downloading an app. Clicking the link on their phone or tablet shows them the site's address, amount of time estimated for the site, a map and pictures of what services to complete.

"It automatically optimizes the routes in a way that's most efficient," Ramsey says. "That's increased productivity 25 to 30 percent."

The software also has saved the company money on paper and ink and time previously spent on writing things down.

ANSWERING SERVICE

Bryan Raehl, general manager at Agronomic Lawn Management in Chesapeake, Va., began using Slingshot in

February to handle incoming leads, both on the phone and through online forms. The firm's lawn care customers are about 90 percent residential and 10 percent commercial, and the company has an annual revenue of \$10 million.

"We've always been big believers that the first one to give a quote is most likely to get the work," Raehl says. "So, when we would come in the morning and see 50 missed calls but only 20 left messages, we wondered who were those other 30 calls."

Now, when someone calls, a call prompt asks them to press "1" if they're interested in getting a quote, which directs them to Slingshot's call center. Raehl worked with Slingshot to convey exactly how they wanted the calls to be handled. He had a Zoom call with one of Slingshot's representatives to go over a list of items like the services his company offers and how it wants the sales script to be handled. He can view the leads and information from the Slingshot dashboard via his desktop and listen to the recorded calls — and the company recently integrated it with its CRM.

The result? Agronomic Lawn Management has been able to capture more leads and even saw a 20 percent growth in revenue within the first two months while retaining the same closing percentage. Raehl says having the service has taken a huge workload off his team's plate.

"If it wasn't for Slingshot, we probably would have had to turn off our advertising and marketing and only accept organic leads," he says.

TREE TRACKER

After looking for software that met the company's needs for more than five years, Ben Cooper, general manager of Rainbow Treecare in Minnetonka, Minn., says his company began using Arborgold last fall. Arborgold provided the feature most others lacked — the ability to track services on a tree.

"We can review the history of what we've done with that tree or plant and communicate that from the initial conversation with the customer all the way through the sale and with follow-ups for years to come," Cooper says.

Rainbow Treecare provides tree care services to residential (75 percent), municipal (20 percent) and commercial (5 percent) properties. The company has an annual revenue of \$16 million.

Other features that have improved the company's efficiency include scheduling with mapping, invoicing and the renewal process. Customers can simply click an email link to view the company's recommendations, plant history, plant map and accept the work.

The company currently has 20 people in its pruning division who use the software and more than 100 users in the plant health care division, with most using tablets to access it.

"It's made a big difference in streamlining all of the information," Cooper says. 📱

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Nashville.



TRACK THE HISTORY

Rainbow Treecare uses software to keep track of what services it has provided for certain trees.



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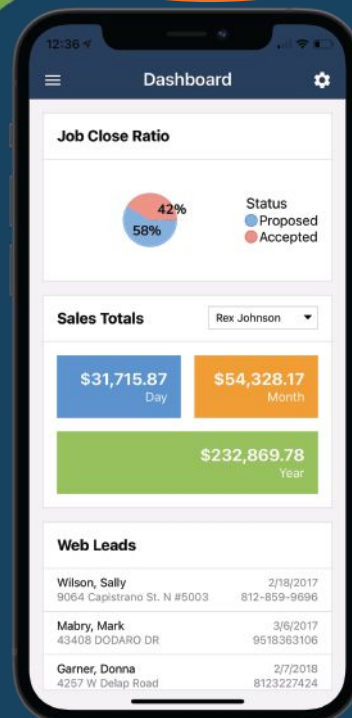
- Carlos Perez, Blue Native Landscape & Irrigation

In 2020, Blue Native was looking for a comprehensive software system that would remove the need for paperwork while streamlining design, quoting, project management, and invoicing for their landscape and irrigation company. After watching a demo of Arborggold Software, they knew that Arborggold's technology was the answer.

Since launching Arborggold, Blue Native has hired several new employees to keep up with the new business made possible using Arborggold's all-in-one business management software.

Discover how Blue Native overhauled their sales and operational processes in partnership with Arborggold's estimating, scheduling, time-tracking, project management, job-costing, and billing features.

Read the full case study at arborggold.com/casestudies



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» SNOW STRATEGY

How to bill for the big snowstorm



BY PHIL HARWOOD

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

The winter of 2020-21 brought big storms to many major cities throughout the U.S. As challenging as they may be, big storms provide several great benefits for our industry. They remind our clients of the extreme unpredictability of winter weather and why it's so important to hire qualified service providers.

However, big storms also bring problems. Big storms often wreak havoc on normal billing processes, resulting in a domino effect of delayed billing, cash flow issues, late payments to service partners and an abundance of frustration.

Even though big storms may not occur every year, they occur often enough for us, as professionals, to be smart enough to plan for them. They may be proactively addressed in your estimating, client contracts, service partner contracts and billing procedures.

THE TROUBLE WITH UNLIMITED SEASONAL CONTRACTS

Many service providers this winter were unable to bill extra for the big one because of unlimited seasonal contracts that gave them no option to do so. If your portfolio consisted of only unlimited seasonal contracts, billing was simple. The only billing issue you may have encountered is with paying service partners.

Service providers considering unlimited seasonal contracts with no exclusions should make every attempt to change the unlimited nature of the contract to allow for exclusions like big storms. A discussion of weather history, probabilities and the risk-reward trade-offs of

“Big storms often wreak havoc on normal billing processes.”

various contract options with a reasonable client may allow the contract to be changed to exclude big storms.

If you are stuck considering an unlimited seasonal contract with no exclusions, build into your estimates the probability of big storms, which may price you out of the ballpark, or knowingly accept the financial risk of not doing so. Many clients with unlimited seasonal contracts with no exclusions expect snow to be hauled, rooftops cleared, parking garages cleared, ice storms handled, giant drifts cleared and more. If you cannot justify accepting the risk of unlimited seasonal contracts with no exclusions, you need to price them accurately and let the chips fall where they may.

There are a number of ways to exclude big storms from seasonal contracts: exclude storms in excess of a certain number of inches, storms with long durations in excess of a certain number of hours and blizzards. Be careful with the use of a traditional blizzard clause, which may be overly restrictive. A storm that drops 2 feet of snow over a 48-hour period may not officially be a blizzard.

BILLING EXTRA

For per-occurrence contracts and exclusions from seasonal contracts, the question then becomes how to bill extra for big storms. Billing for time and materials is often used in these situations. The key here is to have a pre-agreed-upon rate schedule included in your contracts with both

your clients and your service partners to avoid having to negotiate these rates during or after big storms.


If you have good historical data and are able to accurately estimate big storms, hauling operations, rooftop clearing, etc., you may prefer to price these items in your contracts. This obviously makes billing much easier.

Speed and accuracy are critical. Technology allows for real-time data capture of labor hours, machine hours and material usage. Service providers that have not yet employed such technology seem to be the ones struggling with billing for big storms. Collecting data from service partners is best done through a technology solution. However, strict requirements for reporting are essential.

QUICK TURNAROUND

Billing for snow events should be done within 24-48 hours, even for big storms. If your snow billing system doesn't allow for this, my advice is to process-map your system to identify the broken parts and replace them.

An important piece of the billing puzzle is a billing summary. This is a summary of what occurred during the event, completed by your dispatcher, snow commander or whoever is in charge of the event. If designed properly, a billing summary is all the billing administrator needs to bill.

In my previous life as a service provider, we billed every event on the next day. That was 13 years ago. With today's technology and business management software, there is no reason for a delay in billing. It starts with your contracts. Start there and work your way through your snow billing system. 

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HARDSCAPE SOLUTIONS

Dynamic downtown dwelling

LOCATION Huntington, N.Y.

COMPANY Goldberg & Rodler

DETAILS A long-neglected property stood within walking distance of Huntington, N.Y.'s historic downtown. Despite the rundown house and overgrown landscape, the client wanted to rejuvenate the property and develop a multiuse space.

"Our longtime client bought the house for her daughter, so this project was a continuation of providing services for that client, who we provide everything for," says Nick Onesto, landscape designer and certified arborist at Goldberg & Rodler. "She's one of our gold star clients."

The firm created an amenity-packed space where the homeowner can relax and entertain. The entertaining zone includes a cooking and dining space, stone seat walls, a gas fire table and a hot tub.

During construction, an underground stream was found approximately 5 feet below the surface. To properly collect stormwater runoff and account for the stream, crews installed shallow drywell pools under the driveway and next to the garage. These were installed on a drainage gravel base and backfilled with bank run to further encourage the filtering of stormwater.

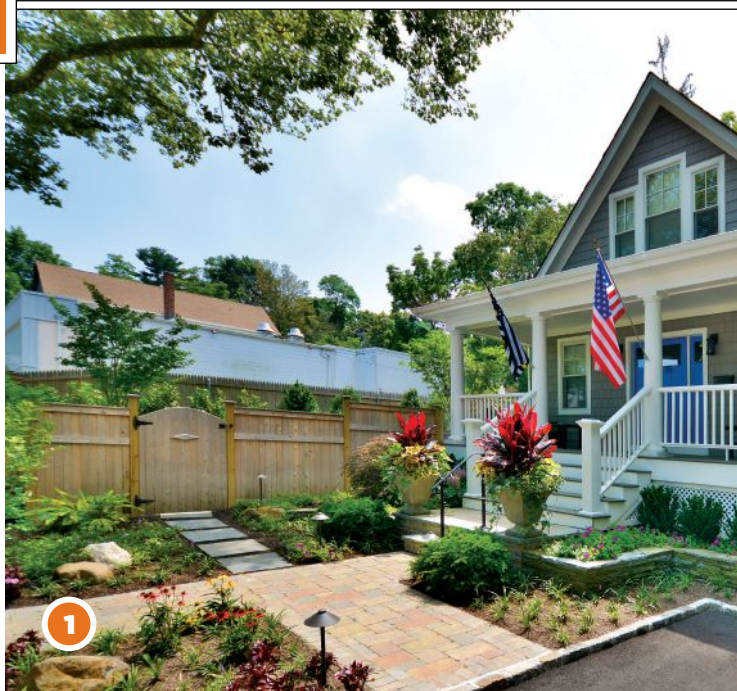
To combat challenges that arose with working in a tight, narrow space, the company used primarily hand tools and a JCB skid loader to complete the project.

"It's a very narrow lot, so setbacks were something we were considering in our design to make sure everything fit," Onesto says.

In addition to providing maintenance services on the property, Goldberg & Rodler also created an elaborate holiday display in 2020 that included a flamingo sculpture, dressed up with wintergreens, Spanish moss and decorations and uplit with landscape lighting.

The project won Goldberg & Rodler a Gold Award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence program.

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



PHOTOS: SUE SOTERA



Captions | **1.** A new facade and updated landscaping revitalized this property and reflect the vibrancy of the nearby downtown. **2.** A perspective view of the side yard demonstrates how the use of pavers and layering levels can create definition within, making a small space a place for grand entertaining. **3.** The house is adjacent to the street and a private catering hall. With the sculpted beds, boulder walls, robust flowering, evergreen screen plantings and a new cedar fence, this space is private and full of multiseason interest. **4.** New stone walls and steps create a multi-level front yard with lush plantings that enliven the front entry and reflect the energy of the nearby downtown. **5.** While many people would pass on a rundown house with a neglected landscape, Goldberg & Rodler's client spied a diamond in the rough. **6.** A gated cedar tongue-and-groove fence separates the front entry and street from the side yard entertaining space. Blue-stone pavers define the path to the side yard, and new landscape lighting illuminates the way for guests. **7.** Mixed materials and defined, yet visually open, areas made a small space feel vast. Colorful plantings enliven the space. **8.** A stark backyard provides a blank slate. Without any plantings, the towering apartment buildings looming over the property catch the eye.

BUSINESS BOOSTERS

CLEAN LINES
Pavers with straight lines can help reduce labor on cutting paver pieces.



Pave the way

A look at the latest in paver trends

BY SARAH WEBB | LM MANAGING EDITOR

With homeowners spending more time in their backyards comes more time — and money — spent sprucing up those spaces, according to Jeremy Eckhous, co-owner of Glow Path Pavers.

“People are wanting to spend time in their backyard with the pandemic; that’s where the action is,” Eckhous says. “So, people are doing a lot of investment and beautification in their homes.”

Eckhous and Beau Rosso, CLT, commercial design consultant for Unilock, share some of the top trends paving the way in the hardscape industry.

1 LARGE PAVERS

While pavers several years ago tended to be smaller in size, Rosso says larger pavers have become increasingly popular.

For example, many pavers are larger than the 4 by 8 inch size—Rosso notes that one of Unilock’s most popular products

is a three-piece pattern coming in sizes of 7 by 14 inches, 14 by 14 inches, and 14 by 21 inches.

“A lot of recent hardscaping trends have revolved around using less labor, as that’s something that many contractors struggle with, especially over the past years with the pandemic,” he says. “With larger pavers, you’re not needing as much manpower to place each individual smaller paver, and the process goes much faster.”

Continued on page 44

PHOTO: UNILOCK



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BUSINESS BOOSTERS



Due to the coronavirus pandemic, more people have invested money into their backyard patio spaces.

Continued from page 42

2 LINEAR DESIGNS

In line with the labor-saving mentality, Rosso says pavers that feature clean, straight lines have also gained an edge.

“These pavers mean the contractor doesn’t have to cut as many non-linear pieces and spend time fitting them all together,” Rosso says.

3 PERMEABLE PAVERS

Permeable pavers have come a long way in recent years, according to Eckhous.

“With rising sea levels and the need for greater control of groundwater

runoff because of erosion effects and pollution potential, permeable pavers and surfaces are now being used widely in municipal and commercial applications,” Eckhous says.

4 PRELIT PAVERS


A feature of Glow Path Pavers, Eckhous says, is a photoluminescent aggregate incorporated directly into the paving stones. The naturally glowing material is placed directly into the paving stones during production. They’re made much like traditional pavers so that they will perform in any environment.

“Contractors and municipalities were looking to reduce their investment in lighting in a lot of ways,” Eckhous says. “They’re good for providing a low level of ambient light in areas where you may not want to have electricity. They’re also an energy-efficient design because they require no lighting or maintenance, so there’s no waste that could be an environmental threat.”

5 REALISTIC DESIGNS

Eckhous says he’s seen increased demand for pavers that feature realistic textures and grains.

“As new formulations and colors are created, there’s this demand to see realistic interpretations in hardscapes, like granite and bluestone,” Eckhous says.

Rosso notes that gray and black colors also have made a comeback. 



Pavers in gray tones have become popular in recent years.

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→ GATOR HPX815E

COMPANY:

John Deere

URL: Deere.com

The diesel-powered Gator HPX815E model is equipped with heavy-duty suspension, delivering versatile hauling capabilities. The updated HPX815E offers integrated park position, improved shift pattern and instant four-wheel drive, providing more control when going downhill. The features of the cargo box allow it to transition to a flatbed that includes removable sides, a tailgate and a one-handed pickup style opening with durable composite construction. The HPX815E can handle up to 16.4 cubic feet in cargo volume. It has a 1,000-pound cargo capacity, 1,300-pound towing capacity and 1,400-pound payload capacity.



↑ RTV520

COMPANY: Kubota Tractor Corp.

URL: KubotaUSA.com

Kubota Tractor Corp. updated its RTV lineup with the launch of the gas-powered RTV520 with a new look and features. The new RTV520 features a more powerful two-cylinder Kubota liquid-cooled EFI engine that provides more than 17 hp and gives instant power with greater throttle control. Equipped with a variable hydrostatic transmission that provides performance on any terrain, the RTV520 offers a smooth driving experience at low speeds. Dynamic braking allows for one-pedal operation. The RTV520 is available in general purpose and deluxe configurations.



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UV34XL

COMPANY: Bobcat

URL: Bobcat.com

This 39.9-hp side-by-side UTV offers seating for six people and includes a 1,000-cc, two-cylinder single overhead camshaft engine. The large, 900-watt stator provides about 75 amps of output for use with the snow blade and other electric-powered accessories, with electronic fuel injection. A large cargo box with a durable composite interior stands up to tough materials. The Bobcat UV34XL offers all-wheel drive, convenient service access, improved ground clearance and increased tow rating. It has a max travel speed of 35 mph.



HAULER 800 ELITE



COMPANY: Cushman

URL: Cushman.com

The Hauler 800 Elite is activated by Samsung SDI Elite Lithium batteries, which are half the size and a fraction of the weight of lead-acid batteries. The customizable Hauler 800 Elite offers 900 pounds of towing capacity with a motor-shaft direct drivetrain, an 8.4-cubic-foot flexible cargo bed that can include a hydraulic or electric bed dump, an optional bed divider, an ergonomic dashboard with plenty of storage and an optional rear hitch receiver. It's available in forest green or patriot blue and backed by a five-year battery warranty.

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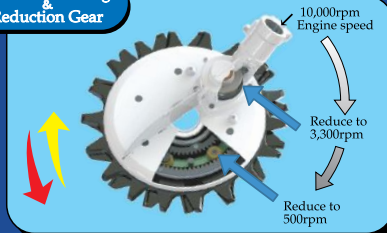
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INSTALLATION SOLUTIONS

Attachment insight

Experts share where they see attachments going in the future **BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR**

MAKE IT MINI
As the mini skid-steer market expands, so has the demand for mini skid-steer attachments.



Attachments help maximize equipment by offering specific tools to get jobs done more efficiently. To get a handle on the state of the attachment industry, *LM* spoke with Brett Newendorp, landscape market manager at Vermeer, and Keith Kramlich, national product and training manager with Takeuchi-U.S., about where the attachment market is going and what contractors look for when it comes to attachments.

Kramlich says contractors most often ask for “plug-and-play” attachments that are also low maintenance.

“They want to hook the attachment up and go to work,” he says. “They don’t want to spend too much time having to maintain or dial it in between carriers.”

POPULAR ATTACHMENTS

Along the lines of working more efficiently, Kramlich says contractors often approach choosing attachments from the standpoint of using the equipment to boost productivity.

For excavators, tiltrotators are an option designed to increase an excavator’s productivity and versatility.

“The tiltrotator attachment functions as a ‘wrist’ between the arm of the excavator and bucket or any other tool connected to the quick coupler,” he says.

Buckets are another popular skid-steer attachment for contractors, Newendorp says. They can move loose material, grade, level and dig. Contractors also like the flexibility of using trencher and vibratory plow attachments for irrigation jobs, he says. Grapples and forks are popular for use with mini skid-steers to move materials on job sites.

Newendorp says he’s also noticed that contractors are using specialized attachments, such as log grapple attachments to move logs and augers to install trees and shrubs.

“They also depend on site-prep attachments like a Harley rake and soil renovator to help reduce labor when reseeded, laying sod or preparing planting beds,” Newendorp says.

FUTURE OUTLOOK

Newendorp and Kramlich say technology will continue to play a big role in manufacturers’ attachments advancements.

For example, Takeuchi’s forestry mulchers come equipped with variable torque drives that allow mechanical adjustments. This, Kramlich says, boosts the productivity of the attachment and carrier.

“Takeuchi’s latest TAK IQ tech is a load-sensing system with pressure and speed sensors that can electronically adjust the drive motor to maintain optimum rotor speed when mulching,” he says. “This technology results in fewer rotor stalls and increased production, as well as less load on the carrier.”

Newendorp foresees more demand for mini skid-steer attachments.

“As the size of this category of tool carriers expands with more powerful mini skid-steer models, so will the ability to operate attachments that require higher hydraulic flow,” he says. “This opens up the possibility of using more attachments that typically would have required a full-size skid-steer loader.”

ATTACHMENT ADVICE


Newendorp says it’s critical to work with a dealer to help understand which attachments work with what machines.

“When you use authorized attachments, it means that the manufacturer has tested it on that machine and determined the pairing delivers optimal productivity,” he says.

Kramlich says purchasing a new attachment is a big investment for a company, but it’s important to look to the company’s future needs and productivity when considering that purchase.

“Contractors who’ve been ‘getting by’ for years without a particular attachment often feel that they can continue to get by without making another investment,” he says. “I encourage contractors to look at the long run. Look at all the other (jobs) you could have now or in the future and figure out how much faster you could perform those jobs with a specific attachment.”

He says that efficiency on job sites translates to more revenue and more future work.

“The investment may seem large at first, but not only will it save money in the long run, but it will also present additional money-making opportunities,” he says. 



ON THE GO
Contractors often lean toward attachments that are low maintenance and easy to switch out.

PHOTOS: VERMEER (TOP); TAKEUCHI-U.S. (BOTTOM)



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PRESENTED BY:

CORY MAKER

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Cory Maker has been with Ditch Witch for over 15 years. Starting in manufacturing, he quickly worked his way up to a regional sales manager for the western U.S. Now, as horizontal directional

drill product manager, Maker works to address the demands of those working in the HDD sector.

CHAPMAN HANCOCK

Product Manager, Vacuum Excavation
Chapman.hancock@ditchwitch.com



Chapman Hancock has nearly 15 years of experience in construction and HDD. Serving in a variety of roles, including downhole tooling engineer and product/market analyst, Hancock is currently the

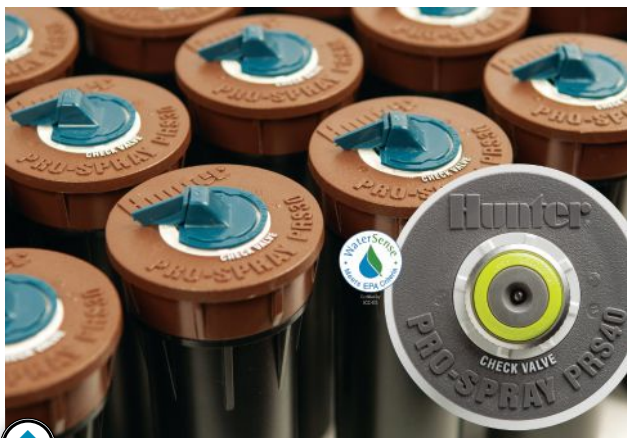
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PRO-SPRAY PRS30 AND PRS40 PRESSURE-REGULATED SPRAY BODIES

COMPANY: Hunter Industries

URL: HunterIndustries.com

The ability to regulate water pressure is crucial to overall system efficiency. When irrigation systems exceed ideal pressures, it wastes and shortens the irrigation system's life. Optimizing pressure extends the system's lifespan by preventing damage to pipes, fittings and emission devices. Hunter's Pro-Spray PRS30 and PRS40 spray bodies are the first pressure-regulated sprays to earn EPA WaterSense certification, saving up to 30 percent more water compared to systems without pressure regulation. The built-in regulator is proven to reduce water waste and promote healthier root zones because water is delivered at the optimum pressure for spray nozzles.



HERMITCRAB PRO SMART IRRIGATION CONTROLLER

COMPANY: Jain Unity/ETwater

URL: JainsUSA.com/unity

When it comes to landscape irrigation, the two most important factors for saving water and cost are response to rainfall and anticipating sudden heat events. The Jain Unity software algorithm does this by automatically adjusting irrigation schedules as the weather changes using the forecast of rain or drought conditions. Connecting to an ETwater smart controller, Unity maintains peak plant health and irrigation system efficiency by showing what's going on in the ground.



ESP-TM2 CONTROLLER



COMPANY: Rain Bird

URL: RainBird.com

Available in four-, six-, eight- and 12-station models, Rain Bird's ESP-TM2 controller is suitable for indoor or outdoor installations. By plugging in the LNK WiFi Module (sold separately), users can access, operate and monitor their irrigation systems from anywhere using a free mobile app. Three available programs offer up to four start times per program, or users may choose simple, one-touch manual watering. With the WiFi module, the ESP-TM2 also can access internet-based weather information to adjust the irrigation schedule daily, saving up to 30 percent in water. The ESP-TM2's large backlit LCD display is designed to offer improved visibility in low-light and direct-sunlight conditions.



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EVERY DROP COUNTS

7 water management moves to make

Many landscape companies still focus their attention on only irrigation instead of broadening their focus to include water management

BY MAX MORENO | LM CONTRIBUTOR

Almost 15 years ago, I was setting up a large weather station for a computer-based irrigation system that would help me manage the irrigation for a large community in San Clemente, Calif. Managing the irrigation for a community of that size was a big task in my new career in landscape management. There were many times I made mistakes while managing irrigation components and water usage. With each error, there was a learning curve and a trip back to the drawing board, perhaps accompanied with an apology when I may have overwatered a park where soccer practice was scheduled.

Fast forward to today, I am thankful for all my mistakes, learning experiences and the innovation of water management. Still, I can't help but notice that many companies do their best to manage irrigation issues only. With water becoming scarcer globally, states like California place restrictions and mandates to conserve water. It has pushed landscape companies to do a better job of managing this precious resource, but it also creates opportunities. These opportunities can lead to advantages, such as reducing the cost of labor, improving plant health, using fewer herbicides or applying water-saving funds back into landscapes.

The benefits of water management are great when applied and executed correctly. I've used and applied these processes or steps to evolve from irrigation to water management. It is essential

to understand that water management is not a product but a process that will differ from property to property and client to client.

1 The first step is making sure you have the resources and knowledge of best irrigation practices. Knowing and then applying are important when evolving from irrigation to water management. Sometimes, a plan on paper looks good but doesn't correlate to the real world.

In my experience, having an irrigation technician execute a program when his or her knowledge is limited can be the difference between a job well done and a disaster. You want your irrigation technicians at the forefront of education and best practices.

2 Pressure-regulating sprayheads have always been a great way to save and help distribute water more accurately. In addition to reducing water use, they also may reduce water damage. Not having to resurface asphalt or repaint stucco is another benefit and reduced cost to your clients. Consistently using one brand of a product also improves quality and makes your technicians more efficient.

3 Property evaluations are also integral to identifying the overall condition of your sites. The information gathered lays the foundation for water management. Assess the current state of the irrigation and establish what the needs are to maintain the site. Give your customers plenty of options toward improving

irrigation and reducing water usage. This is usually a process, and it is best to start with areas that require the most water.

4 Develop a water budget based on what they currently have and what is achievable from your evaluation of the site. Water budget goals should be reset year after year due to the changing environmental factors and improvements to irrigation. Forecasting these water budgets can be tricky, but using irrigation uniformity factors or plant water requirements can help.

5 Embrace technology and start applying it as much as you can. At Harvest Landscape Enterprises, I share the same vision about technology

and water management with CEO Steven Schinhofen.

The ability to be innovative by using and creating apps, software and hardware to manage better is a recipe for success. Smart controllers like HydroPoint

WeatherTrak will help manage the water efficiently while also

reducing labor costs in the field. With a smartphone or computer, I can manage what would have taken a team of technicians to do in the past.

6 Communicate with clients, vendors and your team. Always be transparent and realistic about what's achievable and what isn't. I've seen situations where the contractor overpromised and underdelivered, and it doesn't bode well for business. Listen to the clients' concerns, analyze, formulate solutions, execute and then maintain. The process is dynamic, but the goal is always the same.

7 Lastly, when you evolve toward water management, enjoy the accomplishment and encourage others. Not only is the work rewarding, but it's also the right thing to do for our environment. 🌱



Max Moreno

Max Moreno is the director of water management with Harvest Landscape in Orange, Calif.



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FIVE QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

John Jr. & Bill Caramanico

From left to right:
Mike Caramanico,
Bill Caramanico,
John Caramanico Jr.,
John Caramanico Sr.

PRESIDENT & SECRETARY/TREASURER

C. CARAMANICO & SONS

UPLAND, PA.

1 Tell me about C. Caramanico & Sons.

John: We are a commercial landscape contractor in the Philadelphia region. We service a five-county area in Pennsylvania, south Jersey and northern Delaware. We have about 125 team members. We look to be a solutions provider for our customers whether that be patios, tree takedowns, landscape enhancements — whatever we can do to improve the property. Our best clients value curb appeal ... they want their properties to have a wow factor.

2 This year the company celebrates 75 years in business. You two are the fourth generation of Caramanicos to run the business. What early memories do you have about Grandpa Dan?

John: He lived next door to us. I'm his oldest grandson. When he bought a truck, it was a Chevy S-10 extended cab in the early '80s. Back then, trucks were standard cabs with a bench seat. He was so proud of this truck because it had seats in the back so that Bill and I could ride around with him. I remember him taking us to job sites. He started a nursery 15 minutes from where we lived. It was always special to go with him; we'd stop at Wawa and get a treat.

Bill: We were raised in the house next door to our grandparents, and they had the business here in four or five garages. All the trucks were here all the time. I remember going and sitting in the trucks and pretending I was driving them. It was great having the company run out of your backyard area. That's what I remember about my grandpa, dad and uncle.

3 How have you seen the business evolve over the years?

John: My dad and uncle took over a business that was largely residential. They transitioned it to commercial. The entry to the commercial world was installations. Shopping centers, a new park — they would do the grading. That lasted until the 2000s when a consultant, Frank Ross, who still works with us, told us to get into the



recurring revenue of commercial maintenance. That was music to my dad's ears. In 2003/2004, my dad's focus was on growing the commercial maintenance division.

Bill: It's definitely evolved from when our grandfather was cutting neighborhood lawns in west Philly.

4 What trends have you seen in the business over the last few years?

John: I think technology is here to stay in the landscape business. It feels like there's been a huge infusion of it over the last few years. I think it will continue to grow. We demoed (autonomous mowers) a couple years ago, but we weren't ready for it. We couldn't make it work in the commercial world. This year, we'll demo an autonomous commercial mower that will be put to use.

Bill: I agree. I love our Aspire software we've been using for a couple years now.

BEST ADVICE

"Treat people the way you want to be treated. If you do that, you can't go wrong. My dad and uncle always took care of customers and employees, and that's transferred to Bill and me."

— JOHN CARAMANICO JR.

5 What do you remember about the day you two officially became the fourth generation to own C. Caramanico & Sons?

John: It was an exciting day. It was July 6, 2014. It was almost to the day that my dad and uncle took over the business in 1984. They ran the business from 1984 to 2014. We signed the papers in the same office, same town, that they did back in 1984.

Bill: We started working on it the previous year, the discussions and the paperwork. It was a long process crossing all the Ts, dotting all the Is. It was a good day to finally cross the finish line. 🏁

ONE TWO TREE, GROW!



MARC TERWILLIGER

In the 34 years One Two Tree has proudly served the South Florida community, it has grown

from a 2-crew tree service to a 50-employee, 3-location, full-service green industry business offering tree service, pest control, lawn care, and hurricane clean-up. Marc Terwilliger, President and CEO of One Two Tree, credits the quality of their work and keeping up with advances in techniques, machinery, and products as driving factors for their past growth and success.

Keeping up with advances in machinery is what led Terwilliger to Steel Green Manufacturing.

"When I saw one of the Steel Green machines at a green industry event,"

"Our previous equipment was just too big for mid-sized lawns, and that slowed down our production," Terwilliger said. "Our techs would have to park, walk a property with a sprayer hose to make applications, and then, depending on the next customer's location, possibly have to park and do the whole process over again."

He added, "The addition of our Steel Green machines changed that. For instance, with an SG52, you can pull into the tighter areas of a mid-sized yard, like around trees or landscape beds, even make a gradual turn while still fertilizing, and then head back into the larger areas of the yard. You can go right to the next customer's yard without worrying about pulling a hose, too. Production increases."

Steel Green increases production and saves time by giving applicators the flexibility to spread granular and spray liquid simultaneously.

to the next customer without another step. They do not have to stop and go back for a backpack sprayer. It's a time-saver."

Terwilliger also credits the increased production to the reduced fatigue of spray technicians.

"Our techs were worn out at the end of the day because they were dragging a hose all day long," Terwilliger said. "The Steel Green machines do about 90% of the work, which reduces this fatigue and absolutely helps increase our production."

Terwilliger appreciates the efficiencies his Steel Green machines have brought to One Two Tree, but he is most excited about their ability to increase business.

"Our Steel Green machines have absolutely increased the number of accounts we have," Terwilliger said.

"THE STEEL GREEN MACHINES DO ABOUT 90% OF THE WORK, WHICH REDUCES FATIGUE AND ABSOLUTELY HELPS INCREASE OUR PRODUCTION."

Terwilliger said, "I knew it was going to improve our business. Steel Green listened to their customers and fixed and tweaked gaps in ride-on sprayer/spreader technology that were needed, like making the pumps bigger and more heavy-duty."

The machines Terwilliger purchased did indeed improve his business; they made his company and employees more efficient.

"We spray 85% liquid fertilizer, but we do occasionally put down granular and need to spot spray," Terwilliger said. "The older equipment we have doesn't have the capability to switch easily to a different app like the Steel Greens."

He continued, "Because Steel Greens are highly versatile, my techs can make a granular or liquid application on a property. Then, after discovering a weed, make a spot spray and drive

"Because we are now more efficient, we were able to schedule more lawns in a day. Before, we could maybe only do six accounts per day. Now, we can do three additional accounts per day. The machines are paying for themselves over and over."

For more customer stories, visit steelgreenmfg.com/blog.



BY GREG HERRING

The author is the CEO of The Herring Group and has significant experience in the landscape industry. He can be reached at gherring@herring-group.com.

Why the performance gap matters in the green industry

There is power in pondering answers to good questions. Here are two questions that I have been pondering:

- Why do some landscape companies have an operating profit that consistently exceeds 10 percent of revenue while the remaining companies collectively average less than 5 percent?
- What makes the landscape industry so attractive to private equity investors?

These questions have the same answer. We will explore part of that answer in this column.

The Herring Group recently completed its annual benchmark report, which included 97 companies in the landscape industry. One of the interesting statistics is operating profit measured as a percentage of revenue. (Operating profit equals revenue less direct job expenses, indirect job expenses and overhead expenses, including straight-line depreciation expense.)

Of the benchmark participants, 15 percent had an operating profit margin exceeding 10 percent; the average among this group was 12.9 percent. The average revenue of these companies was \$7.8 million; therefore, the average operating profit was \$1 million.

Collectively, the remaining 85 percent had an operating profit margin of 4.8 percent. These companies were slightly larger, with average revenue of \$8.6 million, but the average operating profit was just \$0.4 million.

What a performance gap!

MORE TO IT THAN LUCK

I wondered if perhaps the high-performing companies just got lucky one

year. In my research, I found that their performance over two years was also quite strong. The lower-performing companies also had consistent results over two years. That research supported my observations of our clients — profit performance from year to year is largely consistent unless there is a specific plan to create a change.

“If a management team wants to change the financial results, the team must create a plan to change the structure.”

Said differently, each company is perfectly structured to produce its operating and financial results. Absent a change in the “structure,” the results will not change. If a management team wants to change the financial results, the team must create a plan to change the structure.

THE LAND OF OPPORTUNITY

Let’s talk about private equity. Private equity investors are experts in discovering opportunities, more specifically, opportunities to earn a large return on their investment. It is their job.

Private equity investors see a huge opportunity in the landscape industry.

What’s the opportunity? The gap between the high-performing companies and the low-performing companies.

If they close the performance gap, they will earn a rich reward. Indeed, private equity investors believe that it’s relatively simple to close the performance gap.

Simply put, closing the performance gap involves adopting enter-

prise-grade technology, management processes, financial talent and practices, employee training and human resources talent and practices. Those enterprise-grade resources are readily available to all landscape companies, large and small.


The industry has always been quick to adopt enterprise-grade vehicles and equipment, but slow to go with enterprise-grade improvements in other areas of the business. Said differently, companies spend freely on vehicles and equipment, but not on technology, finance and human resources. With vehicles and equipment, owners focus on return on investment, not cost. In these other areas, I suspect owners focus on cost, not return on investment. This failure to go enterprise-grade is one of the principal causes of low operating profit margins.

An enterprise-grade resource is more dependable, more productive and capable of growing with the company. Enterprise-grade resources will cost more but produce a significant return on investment, increasing the operating profit margin.

I see these truths at work every day in our work with clients. Private equity investors also see these truths — which is why their money is flooding into the industry.

My hope for the readers of this column is that you will choose to go enterprise-grade and enjoy greater profits — and a greater sales price if you choose to sell your company.

If you are one of the low-performing companies, what should you do?

Create a plan — a plan to go enterprise-grade. 

ADDING ON PROFITS

Proven methods LCOs can use to grow services, business

All lawn care operators (LCOs) want to see their businesses grow. However, figuring out the formula to make that happen isn't always so simple. The owner needs to reach the point where they're working on their business, instead of in it, to experience growth, says Evan Parenti, market manager at FMC Corporation

"Add-ons are usually the best way to do that because they're efficient, more profitable and a true source of growth," Parenti says.

Owners should ask themselves what they're good at and what's something adjacent to that service they could add, says Vince Torchia, vice president of The Grow Group in Miamisburg, Ohio. Looking at their market will give them an idea of what services customers value.

"First, you need to make sure you do a quality job and know what it takes to be successful," Torchia says.



Evan Parenti



Vince Torchia

"The worst thing you can do is add the services on and not do them well and hurt the reputation of the original business."

For LCOs, add-ons could include fungicide treatment or specific weed control for their region, like sedge control. Adding insecticide treatments like mosquito control or flea and tick control are also efficient treatment options, since the technicians are already spraying on the property and can typically mix these in.

When trying to incorporate add-ons, Torchia says a good place to start is with current clients. From there, LCOs can create "did you know" campaigns: "Did you know (company name) offers



(new service)?"

These campaigns can be shared via their websites, email lists and mailers. It's important owners also include photos and information about the add-on services on their websites — and focus on online reviews, the site's SEO and keeping an active presence on social media.

It can take one to three seasons of evaluation to see if the add-ons will work for the

company. LCOs should also track metrics on a daily, weekly, monthly and quarterly basis to ensure they're on track to reach their final goal. For example, if they want to earn \$200,000 in additional work by the end of the second year, they should reach targets like hitting 50 percent by year 1.

FMC partners with LCOs to help LCOs achieve success with add-on services and more. FMC's True Champions program highlights the company's commitment to support and invest in the industry and provides business-building resources and product rewards. The rewards program includes an early order program and the company's new Dynamic Rewards, which is geared toward smaller to midsize companies.

The Dynamic Rewards welcome kit includes a letter from the local rep, a brochure about the program and a weed ID poster, which features common weeds, their indicators and how to treat them.

Enrollment also includes a one-year paid membership for the National Associate of Landscape Professionals. That membership will continue for future years if the member maintains the designated tier. For more information or to enroll at no cost, visit www.fmctruechampions.com/lawn-care.

"The environment is perfect for this type of growth because people are staying home, working on their homes and seeing the value in them," Parenti says.

— FMC —

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BY BEN GANDY

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

How to have successful meetings

It's easy to criticize meetings. "Boring" or "a waste of time" are not uncommon characterizations, but meetings are a necessary part of business. We need to make decisions, create plans, share information, change behaviors, teach, learn and create accountability. And, by the way, we need to develop, grow and sustain relationships and have fun. Meetings provide an efficient format for these things.

STANDING MEETINGS VS. SPECIAL MEETINGS

Certain meetings should occur on a repetitive cadence with the same team every week.

The sales meeting, production meeting, staff meeting and leadership meeting are all gatherings that occur on a regular, repeating basis, such as every Tuesday at 9 a.m. Having a regular cadence for these meetings creates order and accountability. Other meetings may be around specific, short-term issues or projects. Setting the meetings ensures these issues get resolved and the projects move along.

These are good meetings if everyone shows up on time, everyone talks and people leave with clarity about what to do. On the other hand,

if different people regularly miss the meeting, one person does most of the talking and it drags on without clear, actionable follow-ups, it's not a good meeting. Time and energy are wasted. Here are the keys to good meetings:

THE STRUCTURE

Have an agenda. The agenda describes what to talk about. It may include time blocks. The agenda limits the conversation to specific topics. Circulate the agenda in advance. For a meeting like the standing weekly sales meeting, it may have the same content every week. Without structure (an agenda), the meeting will almost certainly last too long while not getting much done.

It's OK if the team gets involved in discussions that are not on the agenda. If it's important (or fun), then take advantage of the fact that everyone is together and go ahead and talk about it. However, it's the leader's job to reel it back in when appropriate.

THE REPORT OUT

The meeting participants need to come prepared to report. For example, in sales meetings, salespeople need to report on their activity, pipeline, sold vs. budget, status of pending sales, current challenges and future opportunities. It's the leader's job to frame what the report should include, keep the discussion on track and provide feedback. If the salesperson had a successful week, acknowledge and celebrate it. If not, press for what can be done differently to change the results.

The epitome of a boring meeting is when the leader comes in with a stack of reports no one else has seen and provides commentary on them. It is so much more engaging when

the participants bring their reports and present their results to their peers and the boss. There inevitably will be someone whose delivery is weak or whose performance is poor. It's the boss's job to assess the future potential of the participant and determine if coaching and guidance can get the person on the right track or if he or she might do better at a different position.

THE SUMMARY

Keep in mind the purpose of meetings: to make decisions, create plans, share information, change behaviors, teach, learn and create accountability. As reports are completed or topics discussed, it's great to have the leader provide a summary comment or two about the plan, decision, next steps, behavioral expectations or deliverables, including specifics like who and when.

THE PACE

It's the leader's job to start and end meetings on time and move the conversation along. People will generally tolerate it if the meeting starts five minutes late, but it's not a great example or use of time to allow tardiness. Keep the meeting moving. Leaders may need to practice speeding up the pace. Talk faster, and use short sentences. Everyone will be grateful. Leaders also need to be prepared to cut off or cut in on long-winded commentary. This needs to be done politely and professionally, but again, everyone will be grateful. If the meeting goes 15 minutes over time, people probably won't get upset, but more than that and attention wanders, people get fidgety and stop paying attention. Bring it to a close. Summarize. Dismiss. See you next time. 🙌



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LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT (ISSN 0894-1254) is published monthly by North Coast Media LLC, 1360 East 9th Street, 10th Floor, Cleveland, OH 44114. Subscription rates: For US, Canada and Mexico, 1 year \$59.95 print and digital; two years \$95.95 print and digital. All other countries, 1 year print and digital \$169.95; two years \$259.95. For air-expedited service, include an additional \$75 per order annually. Single copies (prepaid only) \$10 plus postage and handling. For current single copy or back issues, call 847-513-6030. Periodicals postage paid at Cleveland OH 44101-9603 and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Please send address change to Landscape Management, PO Box 2090, Skokie, IL 60076. Printed in the U.S.A.



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RESOURCES

[GROWING, GROWING ...]

Share your story

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.

Correction: In the Maintenance Shop article of the April 2021 issue of LM, Ben McDermott's title was incorrect. He is the senior brand manager for professional chainsaws and cutting equipment for Husqvarna. LM regrets the mistake.

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.



When a strong platform makes a strong company



I always look forward to gathering with my fellow landscape pros at in-person events, but this year, our gatherings will be even sweeter. GROW! 2021 was a fantastic event, and I'm grateful we were still able to hold the event safely with some added precautions in place. I'm very excited to get to work planning GROW! 2022.

GROW! 2022 will be in Nashville, Tenn., Feb. 22-24, and this time, we will be taking our group behind the scenes at Milosi Landscape led by Taylor Milliken. In 2010, Milosi was doing \$400,000 in annual revenue mostly in mowing work. Ten years later in 2020, the company did \$7 million in revenue, with 60 percent of that in residential design/build and construction, 20 percent in commercial maintenance and 20 percent in residential maintenance. In 2021, it expects to hit \$9 million in annual revenue, and it has aggressive growth plans for the coming years.

KEYS TO GROWTH

1 A clear purpose. The company's growth has been possible because of the talented team at the company, whose core purpose is "Let's Grow Beautiful Together." While Milosi uses this phrase externally, its impact


internally can't be understated. Taylor told us he felt the turning point for his company, when it really began to grow into the company it is today, was when the team understood what got them out of bed each morning and made them excited to work. Understanding who they were and how they wanted to do business was key to everything else. Once Milosi had a purpose statement and core values defined, it was easier to look for new team members who fit the culture the company wanted to have. What is your clear purpose?

2 A company culture based on shared values. With a clear vision for the future and a defined list of who it was, the company began building a culture that helped the team be successful. Milosi found team members who are passionate about their work and that passion and excitement becomes contagious. The company makes it clear that team members are valued and that the work the company does matters by sharing company profits equally among all employees. The team is the backbone of the company, and the company does a great job of aligning each team member's self-interest with the company's interests. Does your team and company share values?

3 Autonomy and transparency for team members.

The transparency at Milosi, as well as Taylor's willingness to step back and let his talented team take control, have created a culture where even former business owners *want* to work. The company has hired and retained a number of team members who ran their own landscaping companies before joining the Milosi team, all because of its company culture. These team members buy into the company's vision, believe in the bigger picture and have the autonomy to be leaders even when they're reporting to a manager. Do you give your team autonomy and transparency?

I'll preach until I'm blue in the face about the importance of a strong platform and a strong culture for your landscaping company, but it's hard to understand the power of it until you see it in action yourself. The team at Milosi has built a strong and clear platform, and it's become the foundation of its success.

On Feb. 22-24, it will open its doors to show you how its team works together to be successful during GROW! 2022. Early-bird tickets are on sale now. Register to join us: <https://growgroupinc.com/grow-2022>. 

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