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**JOHN DEERE**



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ON THE COVER: PHOTO BY DANNY HURLEY

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**Be Featured in LM**

We're always looking for great sources for upcoming stories in the magazine. Does your business service water features and fountains? Has your operation installed a new irrigation system? If so, email Editor Christina Herrick at [cherrick@northcoastmedia.net](mailto:cherrick@northcoastmedia.net). Your business or crew may make the pages of a future issue.



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## Breaking culture down to a science

**R**ecently I had the pleasure of traveling to San Juan, Puerto Rico, to participate (mostly as a silent observer) in the 2022 Outdoor Power Equipment Institute's (OPEI) Annual Meeting. It's a tough gig, but somebody's gotta do it.

OPEI asked me early on to leave my reporter's notebook and voice recorder in the hotel room. The speakers and the discussions were all to be off-the-record to promote free-spirited engagement among attendees. This tied my hands a bit, but I didn't put up much of a fight; after all, I didn't want to get voted off the island after day one.

It was at a poolside evening reception that Kris Kiser, CEO and president of OPEI, introduced me to Don Rheem, the next morning's keynote speaker. A joke was made, followed by a 'don't quote me on that,' — which is a phrase someone with my job hears often. I told him not to worry because the entire meeting was off-the-record. Rheem looked me square in the eye and told me I could consider his entire presentation *on-the-record* because my readers would be interested in what he had to say. After listening to his presentation, I have to agree.

Rheem is the author of the book *Thrive by Design: The Neuroscience that Drives High-Performance Cultures*. His talk was on studying human neuroscience to better maintain employee retention and engagement. The week before he spoke to our group, he spoke to a room full of 500 Burger King franchise owners, all shaken to their flame-broiled cores by today's Great Resignation.

“(Rheem’s) talk was on studying human neuroscience to better maintain employee retention and engagement. The week before he spoke to our group, he spoke to a room full of 500 Burger King franchise owners, all shaken to their flame-broiled cores by today’s Great Resignation.”

Rheem, CEO of E3 Solutions, spoke for an hour about what drives employee performance from a brain-based perspective. “There are thousands of books written on leadership,” Rheem said. “There is only one that takes leadership and breaks it down to a science.”

What keeps employees motivated to stick around and work hard for a company when they can go somewhere else for similar or more money? A word that has been kicked around a lot in this magazine rose to the surface: culture.

“Working on your compensation and benefits package as a way to keep employees is a fool’s errand,” Rheem said. “Once they start looking for a job and they see they can make more money, that seals the deal.”

Rheem spoke about the earliest humans and how they traveled in packs to survive. At our core, we are herd animals. That mentality, he said, has

been ingrained in our DNA. “We are hard-wired at birth to find safe and secure connections,” he said.


What employees desire most is a work culture where they feel safe and secure, and the biggest part of that comes down to a manager who is both predictable and consistent.

Studies conducted by E3 Solutions show employee job satisfaction ties directly to the person who manages them. 84 percent of employees E3 surveyed said that a poorly trained manager created unnecessary stress for them. 57 percent said their manager needed additional training.

Two of the most valuable questions business owners can ask employees: Do you trust your manager? Does your manager trust you?

Rheem said that creating trust comes when managers understand it’s OK to ask employees about their lives, families and weekend plans.

“It’s ironic, for years we tried to keep emotion out of the workplace,” he said. “Neuroscience tells us where people thrive, so let’s move that way. If you want to lead, this is the direction to go.”

While most of my experience at the 2022 OPEI Annual Meeting in San Juan will be forever locked away in my mind ... perhaps Rheem’s talk on neuroscience and culture will unlock some minds on ways to better keep employees engaged and retained. Because like Rheem said, your retention strategy is more important than your hiring strategy. 





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See more great advice and complete answers from our Editorial Advisory Board in the online version of this feature at [LandscapeManagement.net](https://www.LandscapeManagement.net).

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“Stick to the basics: a consistent morning and evening routine sets the tone for each efficient day.”



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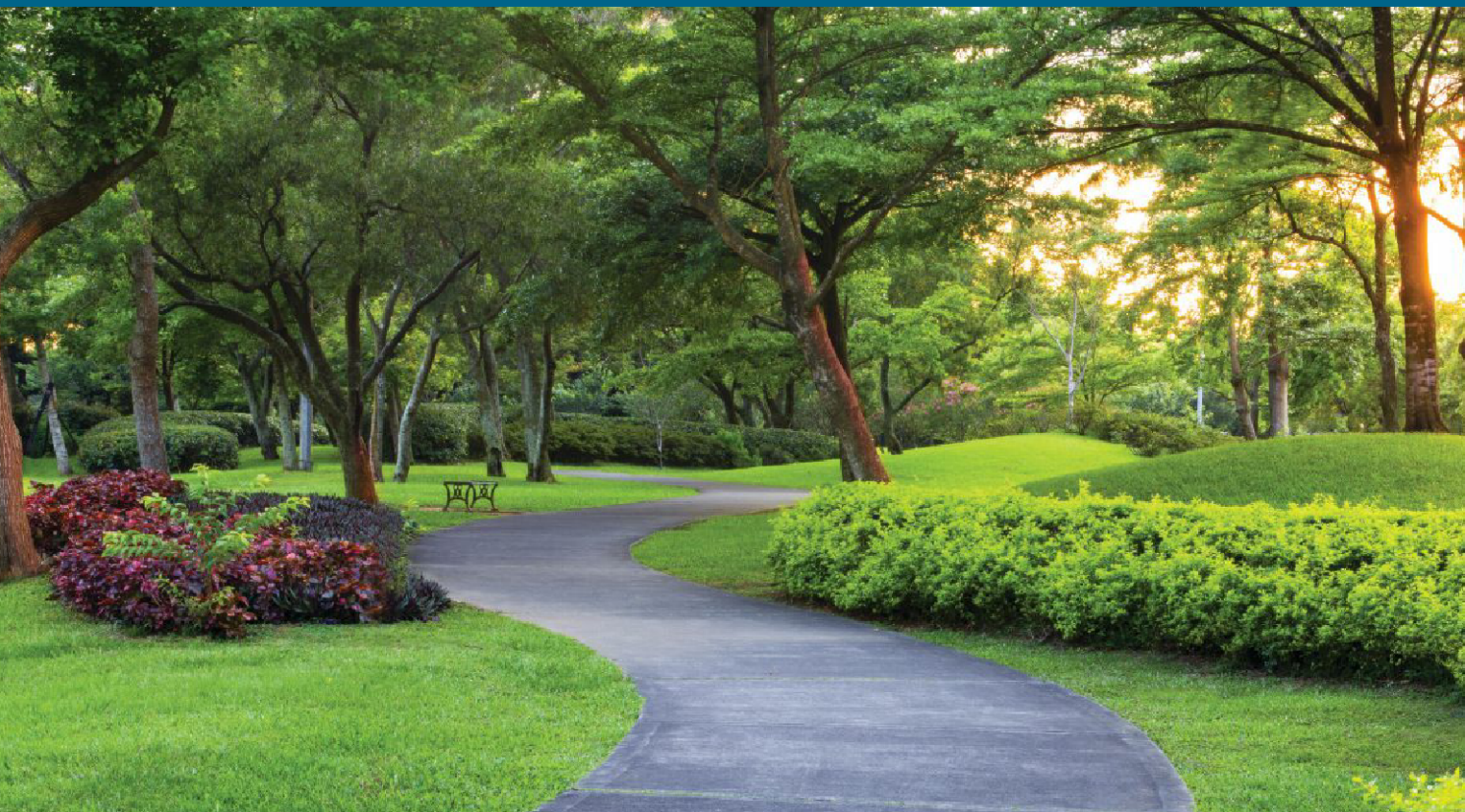


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# Pros get in-depth training at Snowfighters Institute Forum for Sales

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

As Phil Harwood, *Landscape Management* columnist and managing partner of Grow the Bench, and Neil Glatt, managing partner and co-founder of Grow the Bench, kicked off their Snowfighters Institute Forum For Sales, they sought to dispel the myth that some people are born for a career in sales and others are, well, destined to write about sales and sales educational sessions.

Instead, Glatt and Harwood revealed what makes a good salesperson to show there are many types of salespeople — each with their own intrinsic motivations and needs.

The two-day event, held at Ventrac's Bridgeway Training Center in Orrville, Ohio, drew attendees from Kentucky, Pennsylvania, South Carolina and Michigan. While the content focused on selling snow contracts, the heart of the presentation applied to all aspects of the landscape industry.

Glatt told attendees good salespeople need — above all other qualities — a strong will to sell.

"The better you understand their motivations, the better you can manage them, and the better you can help them achieve their goals," Glatt said of those in sales management roles.

He said the true key to a salesperson's success is setting clear, defined goals.

## HAVE A PROCESS

"Companies that have a formal sales process grow revenue by 18 percent," Glatt said, citing data from the Harvard Business Review.

Formal sales processes, Glatt said, give you repeatable results. They reveal



Attendees got a chance to demo Ventrac tractors, attachments and snow vehicles. Here, Caleb Martin, sales manager with Creation Landscaping and Lawn Care in Lancaster, Pa., takes Ventrac's SSV, stand-on sidewalk snow vehicle, for a spin.

PHOTOS: LM STAFF

what's working — and what's not. Formal sales processes are also scalable.

Harwood added that owners often struggle to follow those sales processes, but it's critical the whole team sticks to the plan for consistency.

Attendee Edward Solomon, owner of Solomon's Landscape & Design in Mauldin, S.C., said having a formal sales process helped his team increase their close rate by 28 percent.

## HIT THE TARGET

Glatt and Harwood encouraged attendees to run SWOT and PESTLE analyses to identify their markets for growth opportunities. SWOT stands for strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. The PESTLE analysis identifies the political, economic, sociological, technological, legal and environmental factors a business operates within. These analyses



Andrew Knizner, marketing specialist with Ventrac (right) led Forum for Sales on a tour of the company's manufacturing facility in Orrville, Ohio.

help inform a company's marketing to highlight the operation's features and benefits and how those align with the markets or key accounts earmarked for growth.

"If goal setting is No. 1 for sales, then target markets is No. 2 in terms of success," Glatt said.

Once an operation identifies its target market, it's time to look to sales to build that growth.

"How are we positioning ourselves to be unique?" Harwood asked attendees. 🗣️



**Michael Bowman, owner of Greenscape Enterprises in Richmond, Ky., tries out Ventrac's SSV with a cab attachment.**



## Pros respond to pain at the pump

It's no secret that landscape companies are paying more at the pump week after week this year. According to AAA, the national average for regular fuel is \$4.897 as of press time.

To understand the impact of rising fuel prices on the green industry, Plowz & Mowz, a mobile app for on-demand landscaping services, surveyed its more than 8,000 members in nearly 60 markets. Wills Mahoney, the co-founder of Plowz & Mowz, says members in many markets have seen prices at the pump double from the same time last year, and in response, they have raised prices for services.

"Landscapers across the country on average raised their prices about 13 percent," he says. "In specific markets, we saw raises as high as 30 percent in Raleigh/Durham, Charlotte and in the Midwest, Kansas City and Des Moines, Iowa."

Mahoney says the app also surveyed its customer base to see how consumers might respond to rising prices for goods and services.

"Only 7 percent of consumers said they were considering doing it themselves," he says. "I thought it might have been a little bit higher."

## PROS MULL GOING ELECTRIC

Mahoney says pros responding to the survey said they strongly consider adding battery-powered equipment to offset rising fuel prices. As Plowz & Mowz has polled pros in the past, there has been anecdotally little interest in electric and battery-powered equipment, he says. But, as prices continue to rise at the pump, the conversation changed.

"This year was completely different," he says. "74 percent of the landscapers surveyed are now considering purchasing electrical equipment."

Mahoney said 30 percent of respondents plan on purchasing electric equipment within the next 12 months. He said 21 percent of those surveyed already have some electric or battery-powered equipment.

## Caterpillar to move global headquarters to Texas

Caterpillar said it will move its global headquarters to the company's existing office in Irving, Texas, from its current location in Deerfield, Ill.

"We believe it's in the best strategic interest of the company to make this move, which supports Caterpillar's strategy for profitable growth as we help our customers build a better, more sustainable world," said chairman and CEO Jim Umpleby.

The company will begin to transition its headquarters to Texas later this year but will keep facilities in Illinois.

## N.H. landscaping company ordered to pay \$283K in fair labor violations

The U.S. District Court for the District of New Hampshire ordered a Salem, N.H., landscaping contractor to pay a total of \$283,020 — including \$141,510 in back wages and an equal amount in liquidated damages — to 19 workers to resolve violations of the overtime requirements of the Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA).

U.S. Department of Labor Wage and Hour Division investigators found Belko Landscaping failed to pay some employees one-and-a-half times the required rates of pay for hours over 40 in a workweek. Instead, the employer paid workers straight-time rates for overtime hours worked. Belko also failed to record work hours for some workers accurately.

Due to the willful nature of the violations, Belko Landscaping and its president, John Belko, also paid \$14,231 in civil money penalties.

# Learn why landscaping has ‘been discovered’

Mergers and acquisitions expert Tom Fochtman weighs in on the excitement of being in the market in 2022 **BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

**T**he 2022 Equip Expo, Oct. 18-21 in Louisville, Ky., will feature bigger entertainment stars, a bold new layout and a demonstration area expanded by seven acres (see sidebar, page 12.) It will also mark the return of a popular seminar: a discussion on the current state of mergers and acquisitions in the landscape industry.

That mergers and acquisitions seminar will be held Thursday afternoon during the conference and moderated by industry veteran Judy Guido, chairwoman of Guido and Associates. The topic is an ever-evolving one in the industry and panelists will be on-hand for an “ask me anything” question and answer session.

To learn more about the topic, *Landscape Management* spoke with an expert in that field, Tom Fochtman. Fochtman,

was co-owner of a landscape company for 20 years. His partner bought him out, a process that took more than a year to complete. It was observing that yearlong process that led him to his next career.

“I realized the baby boomer generation is big at 78 million people, and I knew there was going to be a lot of baby boomers in all industries that needed help in exiting,” Fochtman recalls. “I had been so entrenched in the landscape industry. I knew my peers needed help. I learned investment banking in the year I took off. I knew I didn’t want to retire. I knew there was a need, and it was a good vertical. I didn’t know it was as good as it has been.”

#### NEW BUYERS

Fochtman is now the CEO of Ceibass Venture Partners, a company that helps green industry business owners plan,

prepare and execute the sale of their businesses. In January, Ceibass helped complete the sale of a \$13 million landscape company and a \$3 million landscape company.

The largest sale the company ever completed was for a \$64 million company.

Fochtman says there are at least 20 active private equity groups monitoring the industry. But that number could jump to 300 or 400 groups that want to at least look at a company if the transaction is big enough.

“Landscaping has been totally discovered, especially the reoccurring revenue side of it,” says Fochtman. “It has never been like this, ever. It may start to change with the economy, the market, the war, the rates going up, all those factors. Still, I’m talking to a family office right now that wants to be in the green industry. We have yet another new buyer.”

As a preview of the Equip Expo seminar on mergers and acquisitions, *LM* asked Fochtman to provide advice for business owners on how to be properly prepare for when it’s time to sell. He offers this advice:

● **Have a strong management team.**

“A big fear with a buyer is, ‘Yeah, you tell me that you want to stay on, but soon after, you’re gone, and I don’t

*Continued on page 12*



**Tom Fochtman**

#### EQUIP EXPO EDUCATIONAL HIGHLIGHT

### THE STATE OF MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS IN THE LANDSCAPE INDUSTRY

**Thursday, Oct. 20, 1:45-2:45 p.m.**

*Thinking about selling your company and joining forces with another company? Join this ‘Ask me anything’ session with leadership from two acquisitive companies and one business broker. We’ll discuss their acquisitions, what they look for in potential companies and what it takes to get your company ready for sale and maximize your return.*

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- **Ed Bates**, vice president of corporate development and M&A at BrightView
- **Palmer Higgins**, CEO, Mainely Grass and partner at Chenmark

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Continued from page 10

have anybody to run it.' It's really important to have a strong middle management team, strong department heads, and call it a strong GM, a No. 2 person. It's great if an owner has worked him or herself out of a job."

- **Keep up with capital expenditures.** "I know of a company that did not keep up with capital expenditures, and a company looked at it and said, 'I think there is a dent in every single one of their trucks, and they're old. A lot of them have over 100,000 miles.' We can help those companies exit, but there's going to be a discount on the price because the buyer is going to think it has to put a half-million (dollars) in right away."
- **Be the best of class.** "We'd like every client to be what I call best-of-class. That's having a renewal rate of 90 percent or better if you're maintenance. Also, a good safety culture. Have a good facility, where it's well located, and it's big enough, even if you rent it."

Visit [EquipExposition.com](http://EquipExposition.com) to see all the educational seminars offered at the 2022 EQUIP Expo show. 📺

## EQUIP EXPO TO SET RECORD

OPEI CEO says show will be largest square footage in the 40-year history

The name may have changed over the years, but the tradition of tracking the size of the show never halts. *Landscape Management* caught up with Kris Kiser, president and CEO of the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute, to discuss the inaugural Equip Expo (previously known as GIE+EXPO) about what to expect in terms of size, look and feel of the new-yet-old event.

Will it be any different than the same show that has been in Louisville all these years? According to Kiser ... yes.

"We blew (GIE+EXPO) up," Kiser says. "We wanted to start from scratch."

Kiser says that the layout of the show has changed. No more food vendors in the main entryway. There will now be an events center, an education center, a retail outlet and a coffee shop in the space. Among other improvements, the show also added 7 acres of outdoor demo area, upping the total to 30 acres of demo area and also booked bigger stars in country music singer Trace Adkins and golf funnyman David Feherty.

He says that this will be the largest trade show OPEI has ever hosted in terms of square footage. Equip Expo co-locates with Hardscapes North America, and both entities will enjoy the largest footprint ever.

It's still too early to discuss attendance numbers, as early-bird registration comes to an end on Sept. 9. But early signs are positive.

"We're getting a lot of interest," Kiser says. "Hardscapes set a record, we set a record. We are now the largest show ever in the 40-year history of the show."

### NEW EDUCATIONAL TRACKS

OPEI recently announced the broadening of the educational tracks to help contractors, dealers and landscapers explore new business growth opportunities. The new educational tracks focus on leadership, technology, sales and profitability, growing your team, pool and spa installation, landscape lighting, tree care and hardscaping.

Of the above list, *Landscape Management* is the exclusive partner of the first four tracks and serves as the organizer of the events.

"We have a lot of new partnerships, like (the partnership with *LM*)," Kiser says. "We want to bring folks, experts in the field, to the show. We want to make it very relevant to the landscape contractor and the hardscape contractor. *Landscape Management*, the Professional Grounds Management Society, the Irrigation Association, the Pool and Hot Tub Alliance, the Association of Outdoor Lighting Professionals, and the Women's Tree Climbing Workshop — we have a lot of folks in the space, so we want to develop something that is relevant to today's attendee. We're excited about it."

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# THE RIGHT STUFF

Not new kids on the block, these pros share how inputs and equipment save their operations time and maximize their current labor pool

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK  
LM EDITOR

A red Exmark UltraCut 144 rear discharge mower is the central focus, parked in a grassy field. The mower is a large, walk-behind model with a black deck and a red frame. The text "ULTRA-CUT 144 REAR DISCHARGE" is visible on the side of the deck. In the background, there are several other vehicles, including a red pickup truck and a dark SUV, parked on a grassy area. The background is filled with tall, green trees under a clear blue sky.

Frank Maxey, fleet manager for Earthworks, says this Exmark 144-inch mower speeds up mowing times on a big commercial property from a day and a half to half a day.

It's an interesting time in the green industry. Demand for services continues to be at an all-time high while labor, inflation, fuel costs and product availability continue to keep landscape professionals on their toes. With these challenges, companies look for new opportunities to maximize time and labor. Pros share why they've got the right stuff — everything from equipment to new technology — to optimize their operations.

## GO BIG OR GO HOME

Earthworks in Arlington, Texas, manages primarily commercial properties and offers 60 percent maintenance, 23 percent design/build, 12 percent irrigation and 5 percent tree care services. The company came in at No. 82 on the 2022 LM150 list with \$31.4 million in 2021 revenue. Fleet manager Frank Maxey says

Earthworks deployed several 104-inch deck wide-area mowers for a government contract. Earthworks faced a major challenge because only a select group of employees can manage this property given its nature, which complicates hiring crew members.

"We're thinking, what can we do to speed this process up where we are running two 104s side-by-side?" he says. "We ran into an employee issue — we can't get employees."

LSM Outdoor Power in Burleson, Texas, Maxey's local dealer, told him about a new, larger Exmark mower — the 144-inch Lazer Z zero-turn mower. The dealer encouraged Maxey to give a demo unit a spin. Maxey says the first thing he noticed was the power of the Exmark 144-inch mower.

"I started going through all different kinds of grass from ankle- to knee-high," he says. "It never slowed it down."

He conducted a head-to-head comparison between the 104-inch and the Exmark 144-inch mowers.

"I was making two and a half passes to (the 144's) one," he says. "I said 'this is a no-brainer.' This is going to eliminate a machine on this particular property that we're dealing with, and it's also going to eliminate a man."

Maxey estimates a standard large-deck mower costs around \$30,000 and the employee to run the mower would make around \$35,000 to \$40,000 annually, which would pay for the investment in an Exmark 144-inch mower.

"Now, what's taken us a day and a half to mow has taken us a half a day," he says.

As for the 104s? Maxey said he reassigned the

*Continued on page 16*



PHOTO: DANNY HURLEY

Continued from page 15  
mowers to another commercial property, cutting down mowing time at a city or school site nearby.

"We're thinking a year ahead as far as equipment," he says. "We're already into the negotiations for some of the autonomous mowers, but when we saw the 144 prototype, we knew that this was something that we needed to be involved with."

**GOING FROM ONE TO 20**

When Bradley Kesecker started Emerald Island Lawn Service in Knoxville, Tenn., in 1999, he was a one-person show, offering lawn care, shrub care and mosquito control to a primarily residential clientele. He added one PermaGreen spreader-sprayer to manage his accounts in 2005. Emerald Island now uses more than 20 spreader-sprayers for its 20-person crew and \$4.5 million business.



**HALF THE LABOR**  
Bradley and Tyler Kesecker of Emerald Island Lawn Service say the company's PermaGreen spreader-sprayers cut application times in half.

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"He was trying to do too much work alone," says Tyler Kesecker, Bradley's son and area manager for Emerald Island Lawn Service. "He bought the PermaGreen to help with the workload. Now every truck has one as we've grown."

Tyler Kesecker says he and his father like PermaGreen spreader-sprayers due to the ease of use, reliability and the company's customer service.

"I'm in east Tennessee in the mountains and it does well on the hills," he says. "If we didn't have (the PermaGreen) it would be twice the labor to do the work we do."

Tyler Kesecker says he and his father opted for more efficient applications of fertilizers and herbicides from SiteOne using LESCO fertilizers coated with Acelepryn as preventative treatments for fall armyworm and other pests.

"We're doing fertilizer and insecticide applications, weed control applications and a bunch of side applications at one time," he says.

Continued on page 18



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*Continued from page 16*

He says customers seemed to appreciate that using fertilizer coated with another turf treatment means fewer visits from Emerald Island Lawn Service crews.

"If they've said anything, we just tell them we're trying to eliminate stops and use less fuel. Our customers understand the need to be efficient if we are delivering the best service possible," he says.

## TOO MANY HATS

Velvet Green Organic Lawn Care in Wakefield, Mass., has a strong crew of 10 workers. Adding to that group of 10 is challenging, says Tom Johnson, manager of business operations for the primarily organic lawn care and soil testing company.

"Being a small business, each employee wears many hats, and it can be difficult to get someone with the knowledge, reliability, common sense and customer service aspect of what we're trying to go for," he says. "It is tough to get someone through the door, on the phone, for an interview or just to pick their brains."

While he may be the manager of business operations, Johnson says he wears many hats.

"I am not just sales. I'm not just customer service. I'm not just finance," he says.

Johnson said while he may have several roles within the operation, he primarily spent his day fielding customer calls as the business grew from 200 customers in 2018 to 800 in 2022.

"I would get to work on Monday and I would have 15 voicemails," he says. "Each voicemail would be someone needing a callback. In that time span, I would miss five more calls. So it would be like two steps forward and then one step back."

Velvet Green started using Slingshot to help field the volume of inquiries and cut down on customers and potential customers leaving voicemails. Agents at Slingshot capture the information needed from potential customers so the team at Velvet Green can give them a service quote quickly.

Johnson ballparkes the time Slingshot saves him a week to around two to four hours. That might seem like a small number, but during the busy season time is at a premium.

"Slingshot has definitely helped us manage our business better with time, allowing calls to go through and knowing that someone on the other end will pick it up," he says. "A new customer or an existing customer will always be talking to someone. That really helps to manage expectations of customers."

## GETTING EFFICIENT

Like most business owners in the green industry, Caleb Gettle, owner of Left Side Lawn Care in Evansdale, Iowa, struggles to find part-time help for his 20 percent commercial, 80 percent residential turf care business. While Gettle's fertilizer and weed control business has grown, he says he has scaled back on monthly lawn maintenance properties because he's struggled to find help to keep up with demand. He's constantly looking for ways to do more with less.

"I'm looking for equipment that is reliable, durable and able to speed the process up while being on these properties day in and day out," he says.

Gettle contacted D&K Trailers to help him design a 24-foot custom hydraulic dump trailer with a bull gate to access his two mowers and dump on the go.

"Whether it be spring or fall cleanups, dethatching or bagging lawns, this trailer is capable of handling it all," he says. "This unit allows me to be fully functional working on my own."

The driver's side has two built-in swinging doors that latch to the trailer to hold it open while operating the dump. The trailer comes with an oversized hydraulic ram pump and

*Continued on page 20*

PHOTO: VELVET GREEN ORGANIC LAWN CARE



## WITH LITTLE HELP

As Velvet Green Organic Lawn care in Wakefield, Mass., grew from 200 to 800 clients, the team couldn't keep up with the volume of calls and enlisted the services of Slingshot.

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## MULTITASKING

Caleb Gettle, owner of Left Side Lawn Care, worked with D&K Trailers to design a 24-foot custom hydraulic dump trailer with a bull gate to access two mowers and dump on the go.



*Continued from page 18*

7,000-lb. tandem axels to handle heavy loads. The dump trailer includes a built-in tarp system to cover debris.

"I convert more revenue over because of the efficiency of this unit," he says. "I complete more jobs in a timely manner and allow myself more time to focus on the fertilizer and weed control side of the business, which has grown substantially in size due to fewer businesses offering services."

Gettle says he also added a 42-inch Exmark Navigator zero-turn mower. To manage mower bags, leaves and clippings, he added the company's power dump

accessory. With the power dump function, he backs up the mower to the bull gate on his trailer, flips a switch, the hopper lifts and a gate flips up on the back end of the accessory to empty debris.

"This small unit has saved me numerous hours of trimming out a property due to being able to navigate close to edging and tight areas, as well as saving my back on lifting heavy bags of leaves/grass clippings from lawns," he says.

## GETTING SMART WITH TECH

Like most green industry operations, Emerald Lawns in Round Rock, Texas, struggles to find workers. Paul Laberge, vice president of operations, says the lack of labor coupled with the housing boom in Austin presents several challenges for the lawn and tree care operation that serves a 90 percent residential, 10 percent commercial clientele for the more than \$16 million firm.

"Being a luxury service, you've really got to provide a value and show value each time you're out there," he says. "You've got to really separate yourself."

Emerald Lawns uses Anuvia's homogenized fertilizer to get good color on clients' lawns. The company follows up with applications of organic fertilizer to keep soil fertility in good condition while reducing the amount of nitrogen applied.

"(The price of fertilizer has) just gone through the roof this year, like 30 or 40 percent or more in many cases," he says. "That's a huge impact on everybody's bottom line because when you're making your budget at the end of last year, you're not counting on fertilizer costing double by the time you get to use it."

*Continued on page 22*



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*Continued from page 20*

Laberge says Emerald Lawns prides itself on the personal touch, but he also recognizes the need for equipment to speed up fertilization and lawn care stops. The company uses Z-Spray spreader-sprayers to cover more ground.

“They’re doing 3,000 or 4,000 square feet a minute as opposed to 1,000 square feet,” he says. “There’s a little bit of give and take, you lose a little bit of personalized touch. I feel like the customer would rather see that you’re out there doing it by hand, but in the end, they just care if it’s green and the weeds are gone.”

Laberge says there’s also a big focus on route density — clustering stops to make the most of fuel and time. Crews work four 10-hour days. This, Laberge says, makes crews more efficient and cuts down on drive times.

“I spent four hours labor versus five (labor) a week, per man, driving,” he says.

Emerald Lawns also deploys Verizon Connect Reveal GPS monitoring. Laberge says this technology provides a lot of insight into how crews operate vehicles, especially in the hot Texas sun.

“Some of the trucks were getting started at 6 a.m. and not shutting off till 4 p.m.,” Laberge says, noting once the team reminded drivers they shouldn’t be idling their vehicles, the company saw huge savings. “The first year we started monitoring, our fleet grew by like, 12, or 14 trucks and we saved \$38,000 to \$50,000 in fuel.”



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## HOW TO

# Get the scoop on crabgrass and goosegrass treatments

Experts from Nufarm and Syngenta share the ins and outs of controls for these pesky weeds

BY GEORGE KEGODE, PH.D. | CONTRIBUTOR

It's that time of year again when crabgrass and goosegrass attempt to outcompete turfgrass species and take over lawns. However, there is hope. Aaron Hathaway, technical services manager for Nufarm, and Dean Mosdell, technical manager for Syngenta, share some expert advice on how preemergent and postemergent herbicide applications work to give you the best control of these turf weeds.

## POSTEMERGENT CONTROL

Experts say it's difficult to control crabgrass and goosegrass after emergence and usually provides mixed results. A commonly used herbicide for crabgrass control is quinclorac. However, lawn care operators (LCOs) should add a non-ionic surfactant to quinclorac for the best results. Hathaway adds that quinclorac does not work well with crabgrass seedlings between one- to three-tiller stages. Also, quinclorac does not control goosegrass.

Mesotrione is another postemergent herbicide option for LCOs to control crabgrass, but experts say it will not control goosegrass.

"Mesotrione can also provide some preemergence control because it persists in the soil after application and can prevent crabgrass seedlings from emerging," Mosdell says.

Though there are few postemergent herbicide options for goosegrass, experts say sulfentrazone or topramezone — when applied with a non-ionic surfactant — will provide good control. Mosdell says applicators must pay close attention

to turfgrass species and product labels to avoid herbicide injury when using these postemergent herbicides.

Many postemergent herbicides act systemically and have a narrow window when pros can apply them without injuring established turf. In contrast, preemergent herbicides are safe on established turf because they prevent seedling emergence.

In cool-season turf, pros can use fenoxaprop-p-ethyl for postemergent control of crabgrass and goosegrass. However, Hathaway says fenoxaprop-p-ethyl is incompatible with major broadleaf weed control herbicides commonly used as tank-mix partners.

To prevent crabgrass and goosegrass infestations, Mosdell says pros should not mow turf too low, should use proper irrigation and should aerate turf in the fall. Hathaway adds that if pros identify crabgrass and goosegrass infestations late in the season, the best option is to use postemergent herbicide applications to minimize weed seed production and begin the following season with a good preemergent crabgrass and goosegrass control program.

## PREEMERGENT CONTROL

For the best preemergent crabgrass control, experts say pros should apply dinitroaniline herbicides — such as pendimethalin, trifluralin and prodiamine — as soon as the snow melts.

"Dinitroaniline herbicides are safe to use on cool-season and warm-season turfgrass, and they have a residual effect that enhances the ability to prevent crabgrass from emerging,"



### HOLD THE BLEACH

This postemergent mesotrione application on crabgrass resulted in bleached plants. Similar effects could happen with topramezone applications.


says Hathaway. "The first split application should be the full label rate of the dinitroaniline herbicide while the second split application should be half the full rate."

Alternatively, following the first split application of dinitroaniline herbicide, Hathaway says pros can apply a full label rate of dithiopyr as the second split treatment to control crabgrass.

"Dithiopyr can also be applied in two split applications for crabgrass control, and since it has some early postemergence activity, it can control crabgrass seedlings missed by the dinitroaniline herbicide used in the first split application," says Hathaway.

Experts say indaziflam is another option for preemergent control of crabgrass and is safe to use on warm-season turfgrass.

Goosegrass control is more problematic because of late germination compared to crabgrass. Dinitroaniline herbicides such as dithiopyr and indaziflam will provide good control when LCOs use the highest label and properly time split applications.

Mosdell says because goosegrass is common along driveways and areas with compacted soil, such as walkways, using the highest label rate for both split applications of a dinitroaniline herbicide will provide good preemergent control of goosegrass. 

George Kegode, Ph.D., is a consultant and writer specializing in pest and weed management based in Missouri.

## BUSINESS BOOSTERS

# Tips for successful franchising

## A Spring-Green franchisee shares what pros should look for in a potential franchisor

BY ROB DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

**J**im Mercon already owned a successful mowing and maintenance business before venturing into the world of franchising.

Mercon, owner of Nature Cuts in Valparaiso, Ind., added lawn care services to his business through a partnership with Spring-Green Lawn Care. He says it has been “one of the more enjoyable things I’ve done.”

“We began as an adjunct or an addition to our mowing business,” he says.

“We’ve been in that business for over 20 years. To take advantage of our current customer base and expand it, we wanted to diversify.”

Mercon says he thoroughly searched for a franchisor. He shared his thoughts on what landscape professionals should look for in a franchise with *LM*.

### GROWING STRONG

Mercon joined Spring-Green as a franchisee in 2018; in the four years since, the lawn care side of Nature Cuts has

grown to match his mowing business in size and revenue.

“That decision proved quite well,” he says. “This year, we’re in the \$500,000 range, and for a startup, that’s quite good.”

Nature Cuts provides lawn care services, mowing and snow removal to a 95 percent residential clientele.

He also says he and his son, John, president of Nature Cuts, continue to learn about this new side of their business with help from Spring-Green.

“We were very inexperienced in lawn treatment; we needed some mentors and teachers, coaches and leaders to help us with that knowledge base to move forward,” he says.

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## FINDING A MATCH

In his search, Mercon says he had a handful of characteristics he was looking for in a franchisor, such as a strong mentoring program and a good track record. He was also looking for a “semi-local” franchisor, which he found in Spring-Green, headquartered in Plainfield, Ill., around a two-hour drive from Nature Cuts.

Mercon says he took advantage of that closeness, driving to Plainfield and meeting in person with the team at Spring-Green to discuss and coordinate business plans over the first several months of his partnership with the company.

“I looked at quite a few of the others out there, and what was important to (John) and me was a good mentoring program,” says Mercon. “Someone that had a good track record and a decent number of other franchisees that were

“A lot of people think that the franchisor is going to do everything for you. But that’s not the case; they’re going to guide, mentor and coach you. The day-to-day decisions are yours.”

— JIM MERCON, NATURE CUTS



also happy with their decision.”

Joining a franchise is a monetary investment, Mercon says, which is something to keep in mind when looking for a franchisor.

“The price to get started was reasonable, it takes an investment, and we were willing to make it,” he says.

The Spring-Green franchise fee sits at \$40,000, with a lower \$25,000 option for green industry business owners who qualify for the company’s Green Associate Program.

## KEEP THIS IN MIND

Mercon says franchising is not for every pro.

“There has to be mutual respect for the franchising industry. That doesn’t mean that the franchisor is your boss; it means they are your partner,” he says. “If a person is looking at a franchise to work by themselves, they need to know that they have a partner that is equally as interested in their success as they ought to be.”

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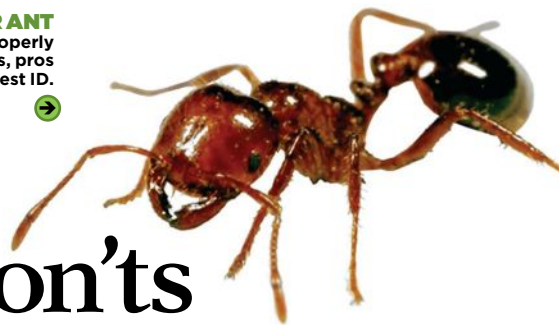


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## INSECT ID + CONTROL

# Fire ant do's and don'ts

Experts share tips to help pros keep red imported fire ants in check **BY LAUREN DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR**

**H**aving fire ant mounds throughout a lawn can limit your customers' ability to use it while also posing a risk for people on the site. Red imported fire ants are a non-native, mound-building ant species that have become established in many states, particularly in the Southeast, says Heather Patterson, technical service manager for Quali-Pro.

Fire ants are 1/8 to 1/4 inches long with a reddish-brown color. Ants will aggressively defend mounds by running out and stinging intruders, says Todd Lowe, technical service manager for the Bayer Green Solutions team.

Experts say there are different ways to manage this pest, from granular insecticides and baits to liquid concentrates. Professionals should incorporate the following tips to get the best results. As always, read and follow control product label instructions.

## DO

**Act.** "If you have active fire ant mounds, you'll want to treat them when you discover them," says Jen Browning, pest control adviser (PCA) and technical

service representative for BASF. "Their mounds are a hazard in the landscape for people, animals and equipment."

**Use fresh bait.** If you're using bait, make sure it's not past its prime. "Baits contain a food source that is taken back to the colony, and it may expire and become less appetizing," Lowe says.

**Prepare for population booms in summer after a rain.** "If you can intercept the mated females before they start new colonies, that can reduce your colony pressure down the road," Browning says.

**Get a head start.** "Bait applications in the fall are effective for targeting these fire ant colonies when they are in decline, helping to reduce the population and mounds that will be observed the following spring," Patterson says.

**Treat based on the number of mounds.** "In areas with few mounds, it may be best to treat the mounds individually, whereas it is best to broadcast apply products in areas with many mounds," Lowe says.

**Mix it up.** "Use multiple products and approaches if you have perennial pressure from fire ants — especially on lawns where people and animals play," Browning says.

**Consider site traffic.** "Baits can be used in areas with low- to moderate-traffic, whereas it is best to apply products directly to mounds as a soil drench or powder/granules in areas with high traffic," Lowe says.

**Expand your reach.** "Have a second line of attack with a spray insecticide in the synthetic pyrethroid (IRAC group 3A) or neonicotinoid (IRAC


group 4A) chemistry class as a line of defense for ant trails, foragers and mating-flight aggregations," Browning says. "Products that contain combinations of these groups are also available and will do double duty to control other turfgrass insect pests."

## DON'T

**Pour bait into a mound.** "Baits are carefully formulated to be attractive to their target species, and they leverage the natural behavior of ants to seek out food and bring it back to the colony," Browning says. "The sudden intrusion of bait right into the mound can trigger them to swarm and reject the bait instead. Read the label for the product you select and apply it exactly as directed for best results."

**Confuse fire ants with other ant species.** "Observing if the mound has a central entrance hole or not will help you determine which type of ant it may belong to," Patterson says. "Fire ant mounds lack that central entrance hole, whereas mounds from harvester, pyramid and leafcutter ants have it."

**Treat before rain.** "Make sure it's not going to rain in the next few days so the ants can collect and carry (bait) into a colony," Browning says.

**Improperly use a repellent.** "If ants are up against a foundation wall or next to a structure, it's not recommended to use a product with repellent chemistries that could potentially drive them into the structure," Patterson says. "Products like baits or liquid concentrates with non-repellent chemistries should be considered for controlling such colonies." 



**ALL AT ONCE**  
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other ants have a single,  
central entrance hole.

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.

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## THE BIG ONE

# Turf to rival The Sod Father

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

**LOCATION** Hinsdale, Illinois

**COMPANY** James Martin Associates

**DETAILS** The client recruited James Martin Associates for a design/build project after seeing crews working on another property in the neighborhood. The owner desires “splendiferous” property maintenance with tastefully flamboyant plantings.

“You try to outdo yourself each year with the summer display, the summer colors and curb appeal for the large containers at the front entry,” says Vince Callahan, residential maintenance account manager for James Martin Associates.

One year, to help the homeowner conceptualize how the large containers for seasonal displays would look on site, James Martin Associates used life-size cardboard replicas of three or four different container shapes.

While expectations for summer color were high, the client’s expectations for the property’s turf were even higher. The client told the team at James Martin Associates he wanted it to look like Chicago White Sox groundskeeper Roger Bossard, affectionately known as “The Sod Father,” was his personal turf manager. This standard means crews deploy six fertilization treatments and preventive pest and weed applications. The turf also gets humic acid treatments.

To maintain the property, crews use Scag mowers and Echo handheld equipment. Crews installed a Hunter irrigation system after addressing drainage issues identified when the company started caring for the property.

James Martin Associates won a gold award from the 2021 National Association of Landscape Professionals’ Awards of Excellence program for this project. 🏆

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



**Captions | 1.** This homeowner wants a lush lawn that would rival a professional ballpark. Crews define bed lines each visit. The homeowner expects full beds with a natural shape without looking untidy. **2.** The team at James Martin Associates used life-size cardboard cutouts of different container options to help the homeowner visualize the size and relationship to the entry space. **3.** Crews plant around 3,000 tulip bulbs in the fall to provide the property with spring color.

## MAINTENANCE SHOP

### Why it's time for a midseason maintenance check

Experts say it's that time of the year, when workloads from the first half of the season necessitate a midyear check-in for handheld equipment

BY JONATHAN DELOZIER | LM MANAGING EDITOR

The midseason quickly creeps up on landscape professionals, a time experts say should come with maintenance checks on blowers, chainsaws and other handheld equipment.

Glenn Lovell, senior technical services technician for Oregon Products, says pros neglecting maintenance schedules remains a common problem.

“When it comes to chainsaws, it’s important to keep it well lubricated with bar and chain oil,” he says. “Fill your oil reservoir each time you fill your chainsaw’s gas tank. While operating your saw, make sure your saw chain, guide bar and sprocket are receiving oil from the saw.”

Lovell advises pros to use a flat file on damaged drive links to remove burs

**CHAIN REACTION**  
Experts say using lubrication designed specifically for chainsaws rather than engine oil is vital to keep up proper equipment maintenance.



if a saw chain comes off its line during operation. Look for signs of wear on the guide bar, especially signs of interference issues.

“If you see blue spots, consider replacing your bar,” Lovell says. “If you’re finding knife edging — which is when the chain gradually raises a thin piece of metal from the bar’s edge — use a flat file or a bar rail dresser to remove the excess metal.”

He adds that many chainsaw users incorrectly opt for lubrication not designed for the equipment, such as motor oil.

*Continued on page 32*

PHOTO: OREGON PRODUCTS

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## MAINTENANCE SHOP

*Continued from page 30*

Used motor oil contains metal shavings that reduce the life of the bar and chain.

### MAKE A LIST

Jason Wilk, senior product manager with Echo, cites a list of maintenance tasks for any type of handheld equipment. These include removing debris from engine cooling air intakes during refueling; checking air filters daily to ensure proper sealing; inspecting fuel filters every 90 days; checking and servicing spark plugs every three months or after 90 hours.

Wilk says choosing proper gasoline and oil for the engine reduces engine issues in handheld equipment.

“Choose a fuel that has an octane rating of 89 or higher,” he says. “For two-stroke engines, choose a two-stroke oil

that meets the JASO FD standard. Oils that are JASO FD-certified will have the JASO logo and certification number on the bottle.”

JASO FD oils are designed for higher detergency and engine cleanliness performance as well as meeting lubricity and low smoke requirements.

### STICK WITH MANUFACTURER GUIDELINES

Dry spring and summer months often exacerbate problems in air filters, fuel filters and spark plugs. So, following manufacturer guidelines is that much more important, says Teno Cardoso, owner of AJ's Lawn Care in San Marcos, Texas. Cardoso's business provides maintenance, weed control and landscaping services for 70 percent residential and 30 percent commercial clients.

“Don't be that guy who's so very proud of himself because his trimmer starts right up after three years and no maintenance,” he says. “It's great that it is, but that machine is begging for a new air filter. Just take care of it the way the manufacturer says it's supposed to be taken care of.”

No matter the job type, he says that unforgiving Texas heat can turn a typically minor maintenance misstep into a large one.

“The common mistakes in the field are just the general mishandling of equipment,” he says. “It's tossing them in the back of the truck, putting poor gas into them, using cheap oil in them, banging trimmer heads on concrete and continuously choking chainsaws when they get airlocked. These machines literally pay the bills and should be well taken care of.”

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## HARDSCAPE SOLUTIONS

### A collaborative vision

BY ROB DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

**LOCATION** Barrington Hills, Ill.

**COMPANY** Grant & Power Landscaping

**DETAILS** The client approached Grant & Power Landscaping wanting a renovation and upgrade to their existing outdoor living space. Grant & Power completed the project over two months, beginning in October. The time of year the project started presented a challenge to crews. The property is located northwest of Chicago.

Grant & Power removed the original patio and replaced it with one constructed of Fond du Lac flagstone, mortared over new concrete.

The client requested a heated patio, which was tricky for Project Manager Shawn Pawlak and his crew to execute.

“The heating element created a challenge because it’s not like you can just slam stone down and crush a wire,” Pawlak says. “We had to coordinate meticulously with the electrician so that we didn’t damage any of his work.”

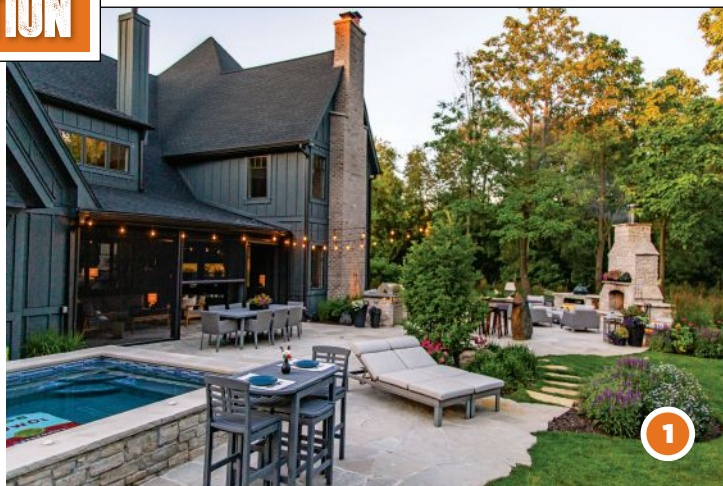
Grant & Power constructed a separate firepit patio, utilizing the same flagstone. Another notable detail is a unique bar table constructed out of wood and two aqua blue boulders.

Pawlak says the client, who is an engineer, was hands-on throughout the design/build process.

“There were a lot of little cool things that came about because it wasn’t just us being the visionaries. The homeowner was certainly a visionary too,” Pawlak says. “I feel like when you have someone that trusts your vision but also has some of that vision, that makes the project turn out better.”

Grant & Power won a silver award in the 2021 National Association of Landscape Professionals’ Awards of Excellence program for this project. 🏆

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



**Captions** | **1.** The clients wanted a rustic outdoor space to entertain large gatherings of friends and family. **2.** The porch features new electric retractable screens and infrared heaters mounted on the ceiling. In addition to the heated flagstone floor, those amenities make the patio usable year-round. **3.** Grant & Power sought to maintain the natural setting of the backyard as the project features a large, wooded area. Shawn Pawlak, project manager, says the home’s secluded location adds to the rustic, country-like feel of the design.

## EXPERTS' TIPS

# Tips to make a smart skid-steer choice

Experts say pros should consider a wide array of factors when choosing to rent or buy skid-steers

BY JONATHAN DELOZIER  
LM MANAGING EDITOR

**V**aried terrain, job site needs and fluctuating demand can make skid-steer purchase decisions a moving target for landscape professionals.

Brant Kukuk, compact equipment product manager for Ditch Witch, says a vital first step in selecting the right skid-steer is considering the tasks the equipment needs to execute.

"With the correct power and attachments, the operator can take a single machine on a job to load, dig or move material with a backhoe attachment," he says. "They can then switch to a hydraulic power fork to handle materials. Afterward, they can attach a bucket to remove the dirt."

Kukuk says pros shouldn't overlook space restrictions on a given job site, especially in residential areas.

"If a landscaper works in residential backyards, they will want to make sure to purchase a machine compact enough to maneuver in those areas, and the machine has the correct dimensions to fit through a fence opening," he says. "We always like to remind anyone looking to purchase a stand-on skid-steer that their best resource is the experts at the local dealership and rental yard."



**BEAT THE SYSTEM**  
Product shortages from supply chain instability are a big driver in pros opting to rent skid-steer equipment, according to industry experts.

Experts say many organizations opt for skid-steer rentals for financial flexibility. Renting can address seasonal demand for more skid-steers.

"Just as important as the machine you are purchasing is the way you pay for it," says Luke Gribble, solutions marketing manager with John Deere. "Selecting the right type of financing when you buy new equipment directly impacts your business."

Operators leaning toward renting skid-steers should evaluate their needs, job site conditions and expected wear on the machine before making a final decision, Gribble adds.

"Renting a machine requires that it be damage-free when returned, which can be a challenge while operating," he says. "If the machine will only be used seasonally or for specific applications, renting might be a more financially applicable choice."

### GOING "TOO BIG?"

A common mistake pros make when acquiring skid-steer equipment is buying more machine than what's actually needed, says Trevor Koolmees, sales manager for Vermeer Environmental Equipment.


"People will start comparing the specs of one model against another and

see that a machine may have a higher rated operating capacity, a larger engine or higher auxiliary hydraulics flow that seems pretty impressive in a spec sheet," he says. "When they get it to the job site, they find they don't need the extra horsepower or flow for the type of work they are doing."

Ongoing supply chain shortages and complications seem to drive increased skid-steer rentals, says Koolmees.

"(Skid-steers) will have a residual value for years to come that can be maximized if you buy quality equipment and maintain it well," he says. "But if a contractor needs a machine less than 25 percent throughout the year, they should consider renting it."

Mike Fitzgerald, marketing manager for Bobcat, suggests pros plan a machine upgrade schedule to give more clarity on a decision to buy or rent.

"(Landscape professionals) need to ask themselves, 'Am I just replacing my machine with the current model or do I need to upgrade for size or for power?'" he says. "If they are doing more with their current machine than they'd planned on, or if they plan on doing more with it, that's a good reason to upgrade to a larger, more powerful skid-steer." 

**INSTALLATION SOLUTIONS**



Landscape lighting installation styles vary widely across different U.S. regions, such as more modern looks across the Northeast and West Coast, industry experts say.

# Pros share the ins and outs of landscape lighting

Experts say there are many options to highlight the complex landscape or plantings of a specific region

BY JONATHAN DELOZIER | LM MANAGING EDITOR

**W**hether it's a preference for more color variance in mountain states or brighter light in the Southeast, industry norms in landscape lighting installations tend to be regional.

Sarah Auyeung, product manager for lighting fixtures with FX Luminaire, says clients have needs just as specific as their locations.

"The Northeast and West Coast tend to like more modern looks," she says. "There's design style and color temperatures that are different. I've noticed Florida tends to light things really bright with high contrast. They also have more dense plant material down there."

Clients in mountainous areas like Colorado and Utah tend to prefer more variance in color temperature. That also goes for Northern California and the

Pacific Northwest, according to Auyeung.

"(Designers) play around a little more with color temperature because of the plant material," she says. "You have more blue spruces and evergreens where the more bluish light is just beautiful, maybe a cool white around 4,000 Kelvin."

"In the areas with the beautiful lime greens and Japanese maples, you can apply a 4,000 Kelvin color temperature on a blue spruce right next to a 3,000 Kelvin warm light on a deciduous tree."

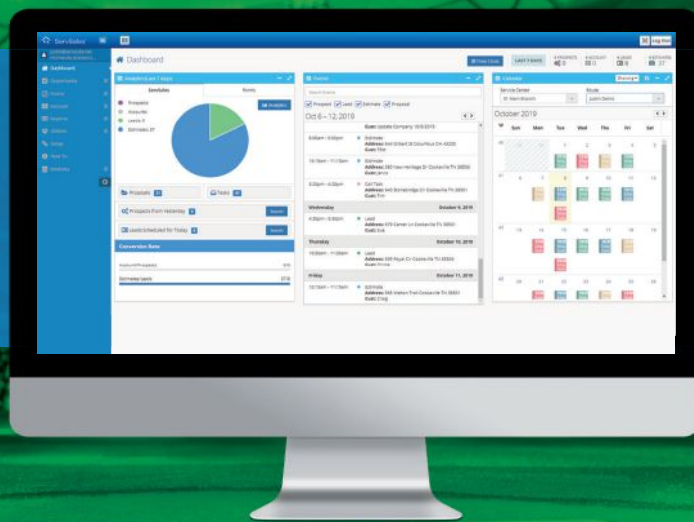
Once the designer and client decide on a proper color temperature, installers must take the increased complexity

*Continued on page 36*

PHOTO: FX LUMINAIRE

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**INSTALLATION SOLUTIONS**



**Uplighting installed for large-scale residential projects accentuates a home's architecture and surrounding plant life.**

*Continued from page 35*

of in-grade lighting into account.

"Uplights and path lights are easier (to install), but they tend to have limited design elements," Auyeung says. "There's a ton of different beam spreads, color temperatures and light distribution intention. When you get to walls, ledge lights and in-grades, it creates a whole different realm of directing the light."

Kurt Keiser of Premier Outdoor Lighting Co., in Highlands Ranch, Colo., a Vista Professional Outdoor Lighting client, says he prefers uplighting due to its ability to highlight clients' homes and landscaping.


"Uplighting the architecture of the house really brings out the color, texture and dimension of the structure," he says. "Colors and textures not seen in the daylight become eye catching. Uplighting into trees highlights the branch pattern, trunk formation and the soft or coarse texture of the leaves. Each variety of tree shows its own personality, from the ground all the way up to the tip of the tree."

### **WHY CHOOSE JUST ONE LIGHTING TYPE?**

Mark Angersola, advanced product solutions and layouts team lead for Kichler Lighting, recommends clients use a mix of lighting techniques, including uplighting, downlighting, path lighting, shadowing, wall washing, silhouette lighting (backlighting) and moonlighting.

"To create a more interesting design, try to really figure out which areas benefit from backlighting, not just uplighting," he says. "Would it create an interesting shadow effect to move a fixture closer to a wall to bring out the texture in stonework or stucco?"

Kichler Lighting client Tim Salopek, owner and founder of Illumination FL, says drilling and electrical logistics become much more important when tackling larger jobs with multiple lighting types.

"It's important to have an experienced person or crew doing those types of installs. When you're installing down lights up on trees, you have to exercise caution," he says. "If you're doing a job where you have in-ground fixtures and need to drill into pavers, or concrete or whatever, then you have to be prepared and have the right tools and skill sets on site." 



## WATER WORLD

# Upgrading a tribute

BY LAUREN DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR

**LOCATION** Orlando, Fla.

**COMPANY** Massey Services

**DETAILS** Partnering with the Orlando Utilities Commission (OUC) for an Earth Day beautification project, Massey Services donated 142 labor hours to install an irrigation system at the onePULSE Foundation, says Bill Cohn, director of quality assurance for the GreenUP division of Massey Services.

The onePULSE Foundation converted the property — originally a home built on Lake Lucerne — into a memorial and museum to honor the 49 lives lost, those injured and first responders of the 2016 Pulse Nightclub shooting tragedy. Crews were required to manually dig on the designated historical site and had to inspect any issues with the system found while digging.

The team initially planned to modify the existing system, Cohn says, but they had to change plans and design a new one when crews found the irrigation system in poor condition from construction damage on the site.

“The new design maintains higher distribution uniformity and efficiencies, meeting the landscape’s water needs while wasting very little through runoff and nontarget applications,” he says.

Crews replaced the system’s high-volume spray and rotor designs with drip irrigation and an MP Rotator system with 45 percent less water usage. The drip irrigation line uses about 70 percent less water compared to overhead irrigation while providing the same efficiency. Hunter Industries provided the major system components, including a Hydrawise Smart Wi-Fi irrigation controller, master valve, drip line, MP Rotators and pressure-regulated spray bodies.



**Captions | 1.** Massey Services salvaged as much of the original irrigation system as possible to re-use and repurpose. **2.** Massey Services partnered with the Orlando Utilities Commission on three Earth Day initiative projects at the onePULSE Foundation.

Massey Services salvaged as much of the original irrigation system as possible to re-use and repurpose. While the system didn’t span a large area, crews installed several zones due to the shape and complexity of the property.

“It required a lot of fine-tuning,” Cohn says. “It was a fun system and design to work with.” 🎧

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.

## HOW-TO

**ZONES MATTER**  
 Matt Blashaw, owner, Blashaw Residential, says it's crucial to designate every sprinkler in the same zone with the same PSI.



# Stay safe when preparing to install a water line

Experts share tips to make the water line installation process as painless as possible

BY ROB DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

There's a lot to think about before installing an irrigation system on a property. What sprinklers should you use? Which control box is best for the project?

Before installing any of that, irrigation installers need to consider the approach to installing water lines.

To make that process easier, *LM* gathered tips from experts Matt Blashaw, owner of Blashaw Residential, Kansas

City, Kan.; Ken Barthuly, vice president of Barthuly Irrigation, Westfield, Ind.; and John Tollett, owner of Blue Wave Irrigation, Tampa, Fla.

### INVALUABLE RECON

Whether it's a commercial or residential site, scouting and knowing what challenges might lie ahead is crucial when installing a line. An irrigation professional can see plenty of hazards


right away, from trees — and roots — to parking lots and driveways.

The latter is a challenge that Tollett, who provides irrigation services to a primarily residential client base, says mostly pops up on commercial sites.

“Try to see where you're going with the line because you may have to go under driveways or parking lots. So before the job even begins, make sure you have all the proper sleeves to get underneath and across things that you need to,” he says.


Barthuly, whose company provides services to a 90 percent residential clientele, says the scouting process should start with the estimation process. He

PHOTO: SITEONE LANDSCAPE SUPPLY



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says his sales team looks for where to run the water tap and locates the water source — a pond, a well or from the city.

### CALL BEFORE THE INSTALL

As always, call 811 before digging.

“I made this mistake when I first started, and it was pretty costly for me,” Blashaw says. “Google Fiber and AT&T put their lines like 6 inches below the surface. They don’t bury them deep at all, so if there’s a line in the area, 100 percent you’ll hit it unless it’s been marked.”



Ken Barthuly

In addition to keeping an eye on utilities, Barthuly says it’s essential to have safety in mind when digging deep holes.

“If it’s an outside tap and a hole has to be 4 feet deep to get to the water source, we make sure that the hole on the surface is about twice the size of the hole we’re going to work with at the bottom of those 4 feet,” he says. “We don’t want to put our employees in a situation where the ground could collapse while performing a water tap.”

Blashaw says that in addition to having utilities like electrical and gas lines marked, he checks for rock that could be underground in the way of his planned route.

Rock can drive up the price of a project as crews need to remove it before installation process can move forward.

“I spray my line of where my main line is going to be, then I take a very sharp piece of rebar and pop that down every three feet, and I get it down to where my sprinklers are going to be — around 10 inches,” he says. “What I’ve run into in the past that is very costly is rock and getting into things that you just don’t know about.”


### RULES OF THE GAME

There are a handful of general rules you’ll want to keep in mind when laying a water line, according to Blashaw, starting with knowing how deep to bury your line.

“You want to bury them no less than 7 or 8 inches and no more than 11 inches,” says Blashaw. “It’s an interesting rule of thumb you want to get below the frost line, but you also want to get them deep enough that if any machines run on top of them, you’re not going to crush those lines.”



Matt Blashaw

Lines that are too shallow could be disturbed by heavy machinery used in future landscaping ventures. While lines buried too deep — below the 11-inch threshold suggested by Blashaw — will not be easily accessible and not show leaks well. 



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## BRAND U

### How Gardenworks connects with irrigation sensors

One company shares why Hunter Industries products are its go-to for irrigation projects

BY JONATHAN DELOZIER | LM MANAGING EDITOR

**P**eter Estournes, vice president and chief operating officer for Gardenworks in Healdsburg, Calif., says products from Hunter Industries have been his company’s go-to for decades, including Hunter’s Hydrowise line of Wi-Fi irrigation controllers.

“We’ve been pretty much installing Hunter products 100 percent,” Estournes says.



Estournes says Gardenworks also deploys Hunter’s Solar Sync and Rain-Click sensors. Gardenworks serves primarily residential clients and provides design/build, water management and landscape management services.

He says he’s been a Hunter customer since the company’s first PGP pop-up sprinkler in 1981.

“I started with (Hunter) back in the days when they first invented their PGP pop-up,” he says.

Estournes says after experiencing a system failure, he learned how Hunter was beta testing the PGPs.

PHOTO: PETER ESTOURNES

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## **HARD WORK**

Gardenworks crews make use of Hunter Industries products during projects covering a mostly residential customer base. During site visits, crews make sure Wi-Fi-enabled irrigation sensors work properly with home networks.

“Hunter came in and installed 40 or 50 sprinkler heads at their cost,” he says.

He says that’s what got him hooked, and the relationship with the company grew.

“Most landscape companies like to standardize as much as they can, so we chose Hunter as our go-to product,” he says.

## **STAYING CONNECTED**

Estournes says ensuring clients optimize their home network is now a bigger part of the job for the Gardenworks team during installations.

“You just have to check that connectivity,” he says. “A lot of the primary failures we run into are losing connec-

tion and (clients) not always knowing that right away.”

Estournes says irrigation technicians check Hunter controllers every site visit. Crews take meter readings to ensure the system functions properly.

Gardenworks installs Hunter’s AC2 Wi-Fi amplifiers and other equipment to get the most out of the irrigation system and connectivity.

“It’s a caveat that we put in our proposals, that the client needs to have a strong or at least adequate Wi-Fi (network) set up and ready to go,” he says. “You absolutely need it to power the needs of the controller.”



**Peter Estournes**

## **TECH’S FUTURE IN IRRIGATION**

“The future of potable and urban water use in California is going to be water budgets,” says Peter Estournes, vice president and chief operating officer for Gardenworks in Healdsburg, Calif.

With a deadline of full implementation by 2025, Estournes says California will require water providers and retailers to submit a budget to the state’s water resource board.

“At some point, they’re going to hold people to those budgets,” he says.

One tool he hopes will be available is wireless valves, especially for the company’s commercial work.

“We’ll go on projects where the wiring has been cut in some renovation,” he says. “If you didn’t have to run any wire, things would be so much easier.”



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# FIVE QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

## Tim Kubista

**VICE PRESIDENT OF SALES AND MARKETING,  
RC MOWERS  
GREEN BAY, WIS.**

### 1 Tell me about yourself. What company do you work for, and what do you do?

I work at RC Mowers. I'm vice president of sales and marketing. I'm responsible for generating revenue and all of our messaging, marketing, you name it. RC Mowers is a young company, about 3-and-a-half-years old. Our expertise is in robotics. We're based in Green Bay, Wis. We have 35 employees.

### 2 It was a lot of fun operating the TK-52XP; it's like a tank! What should I know about it?

A lot of people do refer to it as a tank. It's a remote-control robotic mower on tracks. It's designed to mow extreme landscapes. Think: steep slopes, hazardous areas, wet areas; that is what it's designed to do. There are two reasons people buy it. One is safety. Folks who have experienced rollovers with mowers, accidents, near-misses or even in some cases fatalities, will purchase this product and begin doing their business in a safer manner. Other folks know that the work they're doing is not safe, and they're doing the work with string-trimmers. This replaces the manual labor or much of it.

### 3 What other equipment is in the RC Mowers product line?

Right now, that is our only product. There are three models (TK-60XP, TK-52XP, TK-44E) and the difference between the models is the size of the cut and the horsepower. On the heels of our expertise in robotics, this fall, we are introducing a fully autonomous commercial mower. It's designed to allow a landscape crew to take a two- or three-person crew down to one, with autonomy.

### 4 How did the Great American Road Show idea come about?

It came from the pandemic. When we came into 2020, we were building our dealer network. We were 10 weeks into the year, the pandemic came, and we suddenly couldn't travel. By the end of 2020, we had built a dealer network, but I hadn't met anybody in person.

Most of them hadn't seen our entire product line, and most of them hadn't been trained in person. We had this idea; we'll get a truck and a trailer, and we'll go on the road. We'll teach dealer salespeople our entire product line. Then we thought, well, as long as we're doing it, let's invite potential buyers. Last year we had 43 events. It was so successful we doubled-down. We bought two trucks, two trailers, we hired a crew to run it. We have 150, 160 events scheduled through October. And we plan to run all the way to Thanksgiving. We have two crews running and we do three to four events per crew each week, all across the U.S.

### 5 It's an exciting time in robotic mowers, but there's also a lot of competition. How do you feel about the market?

Let's look at both sides of it. Our current product, a remote-control mower, it's a brand-new space. It's like selling compact track loader equipment in 1969; people don't know what it is. It's a niche business and it will never be a billion-dollar industry. That's one space we're in. The other space, the commercial mowing space, that's a multi-billion-dollar space. Now, full disclosure, we're not in it yet. But there are 380,000 commercial mowers that are going to be sold in 2022. That's the business that we are going after. How do I feel about the competition? There are some very good companies out there making robotic mowers. Candidly, we welcome the competition. Because the more competition we have, the more credibility there is of what is going on. The reality is, there are hardly any robotic mowers working — I'm talking commercial, not homeowner mowers that mow the same lawn every day — I'm talking about commercial operations with (robotic) machines doing the bulk of the work. There's hardly any out there. But that's all going to change in a very short period of time. 📍



RC Mowers plans to take its robotic mower on the road with around 150 to 160 stops during its 2022 Great American Road Show, running through October.

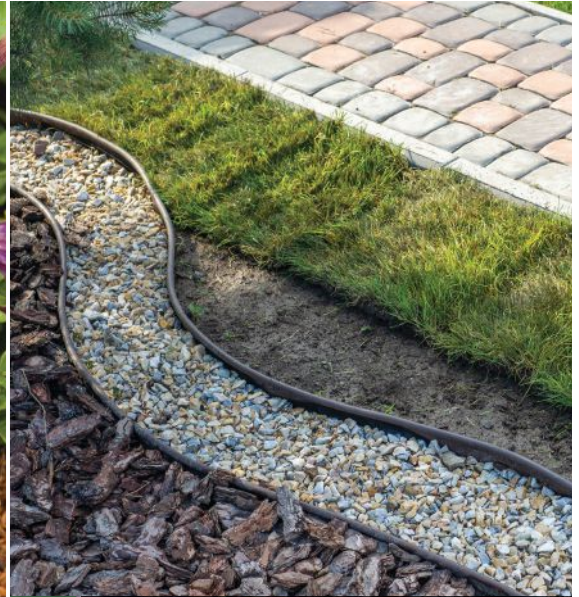
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**BY JEFFREY SCOTT**

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

# Why selling your business is a bad investment

**M**any people are selling their businesses now, and it can make sense for those with the right strategy. While the industry may jump on this bandwagon, no one says, “Hold on, maybe don’t sell yet.”

Selling sounds sexy, but after sellers pay taxes and pay off debt, what they have left at the end surprises some people.

Here is an alternative scenario where you can become prosperous by keeping your business. Take a note from Warren Buffett of Berkshire Hathaway fame: He buys and keeps businesses.

Why does he do that? Because he understands the value of good management and compound interest. This strategy has made him among the richest people in the world.

Buffett started investing at the young age of 14 and keeps investing into his 90s. His 22 percent return on investment compounded over decades has made him billions.

## YOU HAVE AN ADVANTAGE

Your returns are higher than 22 percent per year. The industry average — according to my studies — is about 50 percent (return on balance sheet equity). For some of you, including my top clients, you can achieve a 100 percent annual return.

When you sell your business, what will you do with the proceeds? You may buy real estate, invest in stocks or buy another business. You may do great, get average returns or your new venture may flop.

Nothing is guaranteed.



But if you hired a professional management team for your landscape firm and continued to grow it steadily, including buying other companies if the right opportunity presented itself, your returns could be far greater than you can make by selling today.

It’s still risky, but it’s the devil you know.

## DO THE MATH

If you could achieve a 50 percent annual return compounded over 10 more years, you would have one heck of a return.

Of course, it’s not easy whatsoever to achieve that return, but you also don’t have to rely on your own brain power.

You can hire people smarter than you. And if you don’t know how to hire these smarter people, then you can hire specialists to help you recruit and hire. (Email me for my source.)

It’s easy math, which is why private equity players and others want to buy landscaping businesses like yours. Investors know if they pay a

multiple of, for example, three to six times your earnings before interest, depreciation, tax and amortization (known as EBIDTA) and if they buy, for example, up to 10 companies your size, they can then consolidate those businesses into one and ultimately sell it for a higher multiple, possibly eight or 10 times — or even higher.

## MAXIMIZE RETURNS

I have helped owners set up their companies to sell, and they are happy with the outcome. Some have been able to get a second bite of the apple. When the private equity sells the larger platform business, the original seller gets a second payment of the enhanced value.

But is that the best way to maximize your return?

If you take on the challenge of building your leadership team and scaling your business profitably, you can do quite well, earn a healthy cash flow and build an even more salable business.

If you need advice on growing your business and leadership team, reach out. And if you want to become a modern-day Warren “the landscaper” Buffett, follow my words.

Having said all that, are there still reasons to sell your business? Sure. It’s a way to gain liquidity and support, and it can help you balance out family needs and achieve other life plans. But it’s not the only scenario for building wealth.

**Next month:** Look for a follow-up article that explains what it means to build a business that can run itself so that you can retire in place.



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**RESOURCES**



# GROW WITH GRUNDER

BY MARTY GRUNDER

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



## It's time to get off your island and thank your supporters

I was honored to learn earlier this summer that this column won an award from the Turf & Ornamental Communicators Association.

I may write it each month, but to me, this column is always about all of you — the readers who flip to the back page. If you're reading *Landscape Management*, you're working on being a better team member, leader or owner. You're committed to making your company better, and watching landscape professionals across the country do just that inspires me.

Our industry is one of few with such a low barrier to entry. To get started, all you need is a lawn mower, some tools and a positive attitude. When you put your mind to it, rely on mentors and commit to always trying to improve, the opportunities ahead are endless. Education levels don't matter, background doesn't matter, native language doesn't matter — there is an opportunity for anyone in landscaping.

Grunder Landscaping was literally my meal ticket when I started the company. I worked my way through college at the University of Dayton, paying for each semester in cash

“When you put your mind to it, rely on mentors and commit to always trying to improve, the opportunities ahead are endless.”

from jobs we finished. It took me an extra semester, and I graduated with a GPA so low it was barely passing. I'm fairly confident that under my name on the program, it said: “*Abso-lutely No Cum Laude.*”

When I finished school, I realized that working outside and in this industry was what I loved. While I started the company just to make some money, I got hooked on the entrepreneurial side of the business as I worked with people to make properties beautiful. Since those days, my own *why* has changed. Now, I do this job because I want to provide opportunities for my team. I hope they get to support their own families and feel fulfilled while also enjoying the work. It's extra gratifying that others in the industry want to learn from what we're doing, and I get so much energy from that.

I've been fortunate to have many mentors and cheerleaders in my life who have helped me along the way. The one who taught me etiquette for business lunches, another who showed me what quality landscaping really looked like, the clients who gave me so much grace in the early years, my wife who stepped away from a job she loved so that I could go all-in on my dream, and my

mom who taught English and always encouraged me to put my thoughts down on paper in handwritten notes, emails and columns like this one.

I hope each of you reading this has your own mentors and cheerleaders. If you do, take a moment to thank them this month for their support and the time they've taken to teach and encourage you. If you're feeling a bit like you're on an island, I encourage you to get more involved in industry events. Each time I'm around my fellow landscape professionals, I'm blown away by their willingness to share, teach and support one another. You never know, you may make a new friend for life, and you may be able to help each other through whatever challenges lie ahead. I know it can be a little intimidating to attend for the first time, but I promise it'll pay dividends for you. I wish I had gotten involved in industry events and peer groups sooner.

Our Grunder Landscaping Field Trips start up again in August. They are a great chance to connect with a small group of other landscape professionals, learn ways to improve your business and get excited again about your work.

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