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Why industry experts say advocacy is a critical step to preserving the green industry's future





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HEADQUARTERS

1360 East 9th St., 10th Floor • Cleveland, OH 44114

EDITORIAL STAFF

Editor-in-Chief **Seth Jones**
785/542-2627 | sjones@northcoastmedia.net

Editor **Christina Herrick**
216/675-6009 | cherrick@northcoastmedia.net

Associate Editor **Rob DiFranco**
216/675-6001 | rdi franco@northcoastmedia.net

Art Director **Tracie Martinez**
216/280-6127 | tmartinez@northcoastmedia.net

Graphic Designer **Courtney Townsend**
216/363-7931 | ctownsend@northcoastmedia.net

Graphic Designer **Kendra Taylor**
216/706-3780 | ktaylor@northcoastmedia.net

Senior Digital Media Manager **Danielle Pesta**
216/363-7928 | dpesta@northcoastmedia.net

Senior Digital Specialist **Joey Ciccolini**
216/363-7925 | jciccolini@northcoastmedia.net

ADVERTISING STAFF

Group Publisher **Bill Roddy**
216/706-3758 | broddy@northcoastmedia.net

Associate Publisher **Craig MacGregor**
216/706-3787 | cmacgregor@northcoastmedia.net

Eastern Regional Sales Manager **Dan Hannan**
216/363-7937 | dhannan@northcoastmedia.net

Western Regional Sales Manager **Jake Goodman**
216/363-7923 | jgoodman@northcoastmedia.net

Account Manager **Chloe Scoular**
216/363-7929 | cscoular@northcoastmedia.net

BUSINESS STAFF

Operations Manager **Petra Turko**
216/706-3768 | pturko@northcoastmedia.net

Events Manager **Allison Blong**
216/363-7936 | ablong@northcoastmedia.net

Manager, Production Services **Karen Lenzen**
216/978-3144 | klenzen@northcoastmedia.net

Senior Audience Development Manager **Antoinette Sanchez-Perkins**
216/706-3750 | asanchez-perkins@northcoastmedia.net

Audience Marketing Manager **Hillary Blaser**
216/440-0411 | hblaser@northcoastmedia.net

MARKETING/MAGAZINE SERVICES

Reprints & Permissions **Wright's Reprints**
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Subscriber, Customer Service
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CORPORATE OFFICERS

President & CEO **Kevin Stoltman**
216/706-3740 | kstoltman@northcoastmedia.net

VP, Finance & Operations **Steve Galperin**
216/706-3705 | sgalperin@northcoastmedia.net

VP, Marketing **Michelle Mitchell**
216/363-7922 | mmitchell@northcoastmedia.net

VP, Graphic Design & Production **Pete Seltzer**
216/706-3737 | pseltzer@northcoastmedia.net

VP, Content **Marty Whitford**
216/706-3766 | mwhitford@northcoastmedia.net

Editorial Director **Seth Jones**
785/542-2627 | sjones@northcoastmedia.net

Editorial Director **Kevin Yanik**
216/706-3724 | kyanik@northcoastmedia.net

ILLUSTRATION: REDLIO DESIGNS/DIGITALVISION VECTORS/GETTY IMAGES



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[KEEP US IN THE LOOP]

We want to hear from you!



Has your operation recently added a new service? Do you use weather data for your snow and ice business? Do you have the silver bullet for drought-stressed lawns? If so, we want to know! Email Editor Christina Herrick at, Landscapemanagement.net and you may be featured in a future LM story!

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A man wearing a brown jacket and a tan cap is driving a yellow riding lawn mower on a lush green lawn. He has his arms raised in a gesture of joy or triumph. In the background, there is a two-story house with a porch. The garden is filled with various topiary sculptures, including a large green bear, a green dinosaur, and a green unicorn. Several garden gnomes are scattered throughout the scene, some holding hoses. In the sky, two flying lawnmowers are visible, one on the left and one on the right. The overall scene is bright and cheerful, with a clear blue sky and rolling green hills in the distance.

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SETH JONES
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Contact Jones at 785-542-2627,
sjones@northcoastmedia.net or
via Twitter @sethajones.



LM everywhere ... almost all at once

After a month off from writing this column, I'm back. It was difficult for me to sit out last month — saying hello to our readership here and connecting with everyone is one of my favorite parts of my job. But, I took last month off so *LM* Editor Christina Herrick could utilize this space in the magazine to share what she learned in Hawaii after attending the National Association of Landscape Professionals' annual Leaders Forum.

I think it was the right move for two reasons. One, she deserves the spotlight for the fantastic work she does for this publication every month. And two, I wanted to celebrate that *LM* is willing to travel to Hawaii to report on this industry for our readers.

You might think I'm joking. I'm not. Sure, Hawaii is a bucket list place for many of us, including me. But it isn't cheap to travel there from Cleveland. And it's a time commitment to travel from Cleveland to Maui. And then, keep in mind, just two days after flying back from Hawaii, Herrick and the team traveled to Orlando to cover another trade show.

That's a lot of miles in a short time. But we are serious about covering this industry, and sometimes that's what it takes. We want people to recognize the name *LM* instantly, like they do with their other favorite brands. We want to be everywhere, all the time (maybe not all at once).

Herrick's cover story, "Get involved or get locked out," begins on page 14. And as you can imagine, a lot of what

went into that story comes from conversations and discussions she was a part of during those five valuable days in paradise ... I mean, at work. (Now I'm kidding.)

A few weeks after Herrick hit Hawaii, I went to some familiar stomping grounds: San Antonio, not too far from where my father-in-law resides. My recap of Grow! 2023, hosted by Marty Grunder, appears in our Need to Know section on page 10.

“What I heard the most was, ‘yes, 2023 will offer its challenges, but at the same time I’m planning on double-digit growth this year.’”

It was a huge crowd at Grow!, to the tune of 750 people. We saw a lot of familiar faces and made new connections, including an introduction to Tony Distefano, owner and president of Angelo's Landscape Group in Baton Rouge, La. Tony is the second straight source from my Grow! trip to make my 5 Questions Q&A, this month's edition appears on page 42.

I asked Tony a similar question to what I asked a lot of people at Grow! — what are your expectations for 2023? He's cautiously optimistic for 2023. Everyone in San Antonio was there

in a similar frame of mind. What I heard the most was, 'yes, 2023 will offer its challenges, but at the same time I'm planning on double-digit growth this year.'

As we enter the busy season, I encourage you all to remember that, just like watching our kids grow up ... these days go by fast. It's a special time. Take lots of photos and save them to celebrate the victories when you have time ... and share them with us!

Finally, before I close my notebook on this issue, a special shout-out to Rob Dobi, the illustrator who created this month's cover of *LM*. We sent Rob images of a crew member on a spreader-sprayer and gave him the vision that the applicator was being locked out of doing his job by a temporary fence. Rob turned in this stylish vision for our cover, and we're thrilled with it.

Rob adds *Landscape Management* to his illustrious list of clients. Some of his others? *The New York Times*, *The Wall Street Journal* and the *Los Angeles Times*, to name a few media clients. But he also has worked with some musicians you may have heard of — including the Rolling Stones, Pearl Jam and the Black Eyed Peas.

It's work like this that gets us closer to Herrick's stated mission: making *LM* the most recognized media brand in the industry. Or, in the way she says it: make *LM* the Beyoncé of turf publications. 🎵

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EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD



MORE ONLINE

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

How can pros fight misinformation about the green industry?

“We write a newsletter ourselves that educates our customers as to what’s going on green care-wise in our city (Atlanta). People trust our opinions as we have been doing this for more than 43 years.”



Landscape Professionals

Richard Bare
Arbor-Nomics Turf
Norcross, Ga.

Troy Clogg
Troy Clogg Landscape Associates
Wixom, Mich.

Pam Dooley
Plants Creative Landscapes
Decatur, Ga.

Paul Fraynd
Sun Valley Landscaping
Omaha, Neb.

Mike Haynes
The Loving Companies
Charlotte, N.C.

Luke Henry
ProScape Lawn &
Landscaping Services
Marion, Ohio

Chris Joyce
Joyce Landscaping
Cape Cod, Mass.

Aaron Katerberg
Grapids Irrigation
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Jerry McKay
McKay Landscape Lighting
Omaha, Neb.

Bryan Stolz
Winterberry Landscape
& Garden Center
Southington, Conn.

Greg Winchel
Winchel Irrigation
Grandville, Mich.

Industry Consultants

Neal Glatt
Grow the Bench
Boston, Mass.

Marty Grunder
The Grow Group
Dayton, Ohio

Phil Harwood
Tamarisk Business Advisors
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Jeffrey Scott
Jeffrey Scott Consulting
New Orleans, La.



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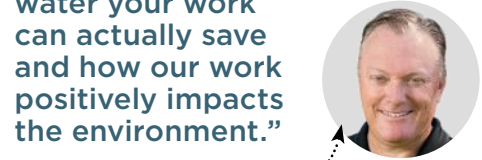


“I think we all must look inward to ensure the products that we utilize to create flourishing landscapes also contribute to a flourishing future.”

“Ignore the noise and focus on your strengths!”



“Pros need to push credible information and cite sources regularly through every available channel of communication. We’re all in this together and need to collaborate to create a movement.”



“It’s difficult to argue with the facts. So make sure that what you’re sharing is always just that: a fact. Share the truth about the products you use, and actively share about the water your work can actually save and how our work positively impacts the environment.”



“Proactively communicate truthful information and respond to misinformation with the truth.”

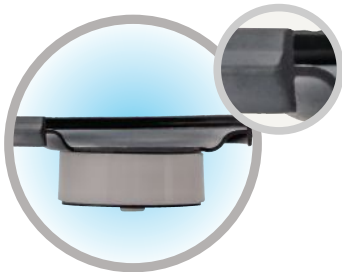


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LM GALLERY

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

1 A proud moment Marty Grunder, president and CEO of Grunder Landscaping Co. and The Grow Group and Brodie Bruner, executive vice president of Weathermatic, join Michael Hupf and LeAnn Ostheimer of Lifescape Colorado on stage at Grow! 2023 to present them with the first ever Mary Ellen Graham Service Award. (See page 10 to learn more about this award.)

1



2 Ready, set, go! Chuck Bowen, vice president of communications and member relations for Outdoor Power Equipment Institute and Equip Expo (third from left) stopped by *LM* headquarters to kick off this year's Equip Expo planning session with the team including (from left) Editor Christina Herrick; Editor-in-Chief Seth Jones; Publisher Bill Roddy; Associate Editor Rob DiFranco; Senior Digital Specialist Joey Ciccolini; Associate Publisher Craig MacGregor and Digital Specialist Sydney Fischer. (Check out page 12 to get the inside scoop on what we're planning for this year's event.)

2



3 Grow! Selfie Jones and Grunder try their best to get all 750 Grow! San Antonio attendees together in one shot.

3



4 Post-tour talk While Jonathan Peterson, partner and general manager (speaking) addresses the Grow! audience, his fellow Summit Landscape and Design team members (left to right) Josh Dowling, sales consultant; Calvin Bradley, installation production manager; and Josh McDonel, fleet and facilities manager, listen in.

4



5 No rain on this party While down south at Grow! 2023, Jones met some Pacific Northwesterners ... Seattle-based Dave Haizlip, project and operations manager of New Leaf Creations and Brandon Neuhaus, general manager of Britescape.

5



6 Hardest workin' man George Kinkead, president of Turfco, celebrated a milestone birthday at a recent trade show. Roddy presented him with a spoof cover of the magazine as a gift.

6



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Grow! takes over San Antonio with an emphasis on company culture

BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

It was a record-setting Grow! Annual Conference in San Antonio, Texas, with 750 lawn care and landscape professionals attending the event. Led by Marty Grunder, president and CEO of Grunder Landscaping Co. and The Grow Group, the event offered dozens of seminars and an in-person tour of Summit Landscape and Design in Hondo, Texas.

Grunder told the packed room at the Grand Hyatt San Antonio River Walk how excited he was to have such a large group attending the seminar. Following his opening remarks, he shared the importance of soft skills.

“In the past 12 months we’ve added (interpersonal) skill training to our rotation of training we do at Grunder Landscaping,” Grunder said. “There are only three reasons people don’t do what you want. The first reason is they haven’t been properly trained or equipped to do it. ... The second reason is they don’t have the capacity. ... The third reason is they have a bad attitude. And the most dangerous people at all organizations are smart people with a bad attitude.”

VISITING SUMMIT

Day two of Grow! started with a visit to Summit Landscape and Design. Attendees shifted between 12 different stations with most featuring a presentation from a Summit employee. Topics included human resources; installation; fleet and facility management; leadership; accounts payable; and more. Josiah Peterson, founder, and Jonathan Peterson, partner and general manager, stressed the importance of Summit’s staff.

“While landscape and construction are great, it’s about the people on this team,” Jonathan Peterson told the group during his presentation. “Landscapes are just what we do.”

Summit Landscape and Design likes to quantify the number of lives the operation impacts directly and indirectly. A sign hanging in the break tent boasts that the company impacts 55 lives (employees) directly and 165 lives when adding in the family members of those employees. In 2024, the company hopes to grow that number.



The company is currently 40 percent maintenance and 60 percent installation. The Peterson brothers hope to flip-flop that number in the future. But the reason isn’t financial. They believe they can employ more people if the company is stronger in maintenance.

Grow! 2023 broke records with 750 people in attendance.

IMPACTING LIVES

Day three of Grow! included more seminars, a keynote presentation by Grunder and even an eating contest. Grow! sponsor Weathermatic presented the first ever Mary Ellen Graham Service Award—named in honor of Grunder’s late mother, who died in February 2019.

The winner was Michael Hupf, CEO and owner, and LeAnn Osteheimer, COO, of Denver-based Lifescape Colorado. The prize came in the form of a clean water well constructed in Somotillo, Nicaragua, dedicated to the company.

LEARNING FROM OTHERS

At the end of the event, Grunder announced that Grow! 2024 will take place in Des Moines, Iowa, with RJ Lawn & Landscape hosting.

This was the second Grow! for Jeremy Locke, director of horticulture and design for Detroit-based Great Lakes Landscape Design. Locke said the event affirms what his company is doing right, as well as fills in some holes on what the company can improve upon.

“They showed us how their culture is very important,” he said. “It’s not the materials or landscapes, it’s about the actual people in the business.” 📍

Landscaping company wins \$10,000 giveaway

When Next Day Sod ran a St. Patrick's Day promotion where one lucky landscaper could find a golden ticket for \$10,000 in a pallet of sod, Andy Robinson, owner of A&R Landscaping in Oviedo, Fla., told his team, "Wouldn't it be kind of funny if we got the golden ticket."

As luck would have it, one of his orders contained the \$10,000 ticket — for a project that brought his relationship with Next Day Sod full circle.

Turf from another sod supplier suffered from fungal issues, and Robinson said he and his crew tried everything to get rid of it last year until he knew he needed to replace it. After failing to get the original sod supplier to replace the turf under warranty, Robinson turned to Next Day Sod. That's when he placed an order and got the surprise of a lifetime.

Robinson said he wasn't the one to discover the golden ticket. He was



on a job site with a client and thought something was up when his phone started blowing up with texts and calls.

"I get a text from my stepson. I call him, I go, 'What's going on kid?' He goes, 'Did you look at my text?' I go, 'No.' He goes, 'Well, you might want to look at the text,'" he said. "I look at the text and it's the golden ticket in the back of his pickup truck."

Robinson said a crew member found the golden ticket.

"Everybody's been beside themselves," he said. "Our guys are excited because they know we share everything with them. They're getting a little bonus. Everybody was really psyched."

A&R Landscaping struck gold as the winners of Next Day Sod's golden ticket giveaway.

Thank you for the kind note

The LM team recently received an anonymous thank you from an avid reader. The letter said:

"To Landscape Management, To all the authors of articles on business, you have affected my business life profoundly. Thank you for all the content and direction. Keep up the great work."

Whoever you are, your kind note touched our whole team. We'd love to thank you in person, but we hope this will do!

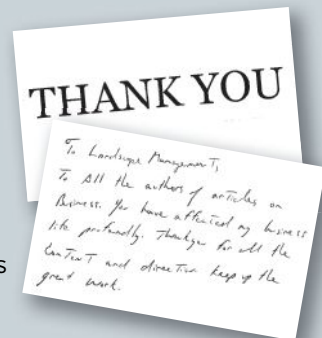


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LM education returns to Equip

OPEI and LM reunite in 2023 to once again help Equip Expo attendees get the most out of their trade show experience


BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Following the success of the inaugural yearlong partnership, the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI) and *Landscape Management* will again work together to provide top-level educational seminars at Equip Expo 2023.

“We’re excited to move forward with *Landscape Management* and our Equip education sessions ... year one was a success and we foresee year two going even better,” Kris Kiser, CEO of OPEI and Equip Expo, told *LM*. “Part of the success comes from listening to the feedback of what attendees want. We listened, and *LM* listened. The success of the show requires us to listen to the attendees and tailor it to the needs of the landscapers.”

Bill Roddy, publisher of *LM*, said he’s thrilled with the success of the inaugural year and looks forward to having the extra experience to build on in year two.

“We were already in the business of educating and assisting our readers,” Roddy said. “We present education in every issue of the magazine, on our website, on our various social media channels and at our *LM* Growth Summit. With the addition of Equip Expo, we’ve added another way to help spread education and insights to our readership.”

The full list of courses for 2023 can be found on this page. The 2023 Equip Expo takes place Oct. 17-20 at the Kentucky Exposition Center in Louisville, Ky. Registration is open for the show via EquipExposition.com. 



FAMILIAR FACES We couldn’t help but smile when *LM* columnist and longtime industry consultant Jeffrey Scott flashed the cover of our August 2018 cover featuring Drost Landscape during his seminar.

2023 EQUIP EDUCATIONAL SEMINARS

Open Book Management and Using KPIs Learn how open book management can maximize the performance of your sales team, your crews and even yourself.

Don’t Just Think. Know the Value of Your Business This session covers business valuation methods and how to build value in a business to sell it at a higher price.

How to Exit with Style This panel helps owners considering selling their business on how to exit the company with grace and style and as a winner.

Your Company, Your Culture Back by popular demand! In a time in America dubbed The Great Resignation, what are you doing at your operation to keep employees from seeking greener pastures?

Electric and Alternative Fuels — Are You In? So much of the equipment at Equip Expo is trending toward battery power and alternative fuels. Is this the time for your company to buy in, or is it best to quietly observe for another few seasons?

Strategies for Supply Chain Success Learn how to create a supply chain management strategy and build a team of leading suppliers to help reduce costs, maximize efficiencies and get the greatest return on investment from your supply chain partners.

The Ultimate Succession Plan: Setting Up Your Business to Run Itself Learn how to manage your numbers, improve your company’s profits and empower your team so you can take more than a few days off in December.

The Ultimate Sales Workshop There’s a big difference between taking an order and closing a sale. This session covers sales strategies and techniques to take your close rate from satisfactory to exceptional.

Mastering the Numbers: Building Business Acumen Landscape contractors at all levels of the organization will learn the importance of understanding their numbers and how to use them to make informed business decisions.

Sweatin’ to the Oldies If you get the title of this seminar, bad news: you’re old. But there’s good news when it comes to hiring and inspiring younger generations: it can be done.

Scaling for Success: Strategies for Growing Your Landscaping Business Topics covered will include market analysis, identifying and targeting new customer segments, building a strong team, and implementing efficient systems and processes.

17 Trust-Based Secrets of Closing the Sale Using real-life case studies as examples, this session shows the power of honesty and humor for building trust.

Lead or Get Out of the Way: Keys to Developing Strong Leadership Skills Learn the essential skills and techniques needed to become effective leaders from some of the best in the business.

The Easy Button Customers have crossed over from wanting attention and customer service to wanting anonymity and convenience. Business owners discuss how they made their companies more convenient for their customers with the added benefit of becoming a more streamlined, efficient operation.

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GET INVOLVED OR GET LOCKED OUT

Why industry experts say advocacy is a critical step to preserving the green industry's future

CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

Imagine this scene: Residents of a county want to ban the use of “harmful” pesticides. During a city council hearing on a proposed pesticide ban, proponents of this bill bring their children to the hearing — in bee costumes. Throughout the hearing, the “bees” die dramatically to illustrate how toxic pesticides are to pollinators.

While it might seem like a far-fetched notion, this exact scene unfolded just a few years ago. Following the theatrics, that pesticide ban passed resoundingly.

This is the exact reason those within the green industry seek to prevent these scenes in the future. And it's not just pesticide bans. Many municipalities and states look to enact noise or emissions regulations on the equipment pros use. And there's H-2B, the guest worker visa program many operations use to fulfill labor needs.

“We are facing attacks on almost every facet of what we're doing right now,” says Andrew Bray, vice president of government relations with the National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP). “The equipment we're using, how we're managing labor to get the jobs done to almost every sort of input that we may be using is

coming under scrutiny from different factions within different interest groups with different motivations. I don't see any of that slowing down.”



“We are facing attacks on almost every facet of what we're doing right now.”

ANDREW BRAY

This scrutiny, says Nick Brummel, CEO of Brummel Lawn & Landscape in Blue Springs, Mo., is why it's more critical than ever for those in the green industry to increase their knowledge about industry issues and interact more frequently with their elected officials.

“We're behind the eight ball on most things,” he says. “We're more reactive than we are proactive in a lot of situations.”

LM spoke with landscape professionals across the country to learn what they're doing to educate and inform their customers, neighbors and law-

makers about the benefits the green industry brings to communities.

Threat No. 1: **RESTRICTIONS TO PESTICIDE USE**

Brandon Sheppard, a Weed Man franchisor in the mid-Atlantic and president-elect of NALP's board of directors, says getting out in front of elected officials is a good step in the right direction when it comes to potential pesticide bans.

Continued on page 16



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COUNTY ORDINANCE



“Elected officials need to know that we are part of their communities and that we are both passionate about and committed to doing work in a responsible and safe fashion.”

BRANDON SHEPPARD

Continued from page 14

“We humanize who we are, and it validates our arguments,” he says. “It makes it a lot harder to believe that we’re the evil corporate faces that our opponents make us out to be.”

When it comes to interacting with their elected officials and customers, Sheppard encourages everyone in the green industry to talk about how the state regulates pesticide usage, how you make decisions about the tools and inputs you use and how you optimize routes.

He says it’s also important to chime in on pending regulations. Years ago, when NALP asked its members to weigh in on pending pesticide regulations, there would be a few hundred responses from the green industry and proponents of the bill would submit hundreds of thousands of comments in favor. Elected officials count submissions, Sheppard says. Comments that show the economic impact of green industry businesses help plead the case against the regulations.

“When they start hearing from members of our industry saying, ‘Hey, you know, I run an operation in your district. I employ X number of people. I serve hundreds or thousands of customers in this area,’ it changes the impact,” he says. “Elected officials need to know that we are part of their communities and that we are both passionate about and committed to doing work in a responsible and safe fashion.”

He says this helps provide a balanced perspective if residents of a community complain about noise or products used by local landscapers.

Threat No. 2: GAS BLOWER BANS

Doug Crimin, a project manager with Pacific Landscape Management in Hillsboro, Ore., says, as organizations seek to enact noise and emission restrictions around leaf blowers in Portland, Ore., his company is at the forefront of testing electric equipment to learn how to best implement it. The company also works with these organizations, such as Quiet Clean PDX.

“Rather than try and work against these folks, let’s try and work with them,” he says. “Let’s understand their pain and their frustrations with the equipment and let’s let them know our pains and our struggles and frustrations with trying to make the transition, but not having it completely work out for us yet.”

Crimin served as the environmental resource committee chairperson for the Oregon Landscape Contractors Association, and he says building relationships was a big emphasis of his time on the committee.

“We always say the tide’s coming in and you can sit there and watch it or you can learn how to swim,” he says. “At some point, we need to really embrace (electric equipment) rather than trying to stay away from it.”

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While this might seem like an unexpected approach, he says as Pacific Landscape Management works with these operations, the company gets insight into the concerns of the anti-blower organizations.

“I think it’s critical to get together with industry groups and partners to team up and look for legislative bills that will come down the pipeline to ban these tools,” he says. “We’ve worked with study groups in the city and the county to look at how a blower ban might feel or impact different businesses — both large and small — and what are some of the infrastructure needs that would need to take place.”

Threat No. 3: H-2B MISCONCEPTIONS

Brummel says there’s a lot of misconception around the H-2B or seasonal non-agricultural guest worker visa program among his clients. He says he often debunks the myths that his Hispanic

workers came here illegally, he pays them below minimum wage and they’re stealing jobs from willing Americans.

Brummel says when a new client pushes back on his participation in the H-2B program, he explains the program costs for his operation and that he pays \$19.50 an hour — the prevailing wage for H-2B workers — while his state’s minimum wage is \$12.

“We explained to them that it cost us close to \$1,500 a person to get (H-2B guest workers) to even come to the country to get started to work,” he says. “The reason why we use the program is we can’t find labor locally. Then we make the comment that if we could find Americans that want to show up and want to work, we would hire them in a heartbeat because it would save us the money.”

He also takes the time to explain to customers the rules and regulations his operation must abide by to remain in the program, and if he violates any

Continued on page 18



“Rather than try and work against these folks, let’s try and work with them.”

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Continued from page 17

of the rules, he's barred from using the program. He also shares with clients that his H-2B employees are on the company's payroll. Brummel Lawn & Landscape deducts Social Security, Medicare and state tax and federal income tax. H-2B workers contribute without collecting the benefits.

"We've done a poor job the last 20 years of not educating people about this," he says. "The more we educate them on H-2B the more (my customers) understand."

Brummel says he enjoys sharing with his clients the ins and outs of why Brummel Lawn & Landscape uses the program, and he says he's noticed a change, where some clients now help advocate on behalf of the guest worker program.

"We've gotten to the point where we've gotten some momentum behind it and our clients know how important H-2B is to this industry," he says.

EASY AS 1-2-3

Getting involved in advocacy efforts doesn't mean necessarily jumping in at the deep end and participating in Legislative Days (NALP's lobbying day on Capitol Hill), says Bray.

"We explained to them that it cost us close to \$1,500 a person to get (H-2B guest workers) to even come to the country to get started to work."



NICK BRUMMEL

"There are different entry points into advocacy depending on the amount of time that you can give to that cause," he says.

You can participate by signing up for NALP's The Advocate newsletter, which breaks down the issues most critical to the green industry and how professionals can get involved. NALP also asks its members to weigh in via emails to legislators.

"The action we're asking is to literally take 30 seconds of your life or your day and send a pre-drafted email to a legislator," Bray says. "We might ask you to go to your state capital if you live close by and provide oral testimony. Or if you'd like to fly into D.C. to lobby on the Farm Bill and H-2B reforms."

NALP will host two legislative days: one centering on the Farm Bill on May 9-10 (and including preemption language to prevent towns from enacting pesticide regulations) and one for H-2B reforms on June 13-14. Bray says he expects movement on both bills this summer.

Karen Reardon, vice president of public affairs for Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE), says taking that proactive step to form relationships with city council members and elected officials at the state and national levels are critical. It can be as simple as an email or attending a fundraiser or local coffee hour.

"Get to know those elected officials, know what's important to them, and position yourself as a local expert who's ready and available to answer questions when they come up," she says.

It's important to practice your responses so you accurately and succinctly convey your message.

"Truly, with many elected officials, you've got two minutes. They're working the line, or they're moving through a fundraiser or a coffee hour," she says. "They're spending truly one to two minutes with each person. What's your No. 1 talking point?"

Another important part of communicating with elected officials is to not speculate if you don't know the answer.

"Do not feel like you need to know everything under the sun. Be willing to say, 'You know, I don't know the

Continued on page 20

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“Be willing to say, ‘you know, I don’t know the answer to that today, but I know someone who can get me that answer and I’ll be back to you.’”

KAREN REARDON

Continued from page 18
answer to that today, but I know someone who can get me that answer and I’ll be back to you,” she says. “You’ve created this great second touch point with that elected official to be back in touch and on the record in writing.”

LITTLE VICTORIES

It’s not all doom and gloom, says Bray. He points to specific results in key issues critical to the green industry to show that advocacy and grassroots involvement works.

“If people don’t think that progress has been made on H-2B, they’re not paying attention,” he says. “We have essentially doubled the cap this year (an additional 64,716 visas available for 2023 vs. 33,000 visas for 2022). I think that the only reason that happened was we had so much movement and momentum over the last couple of years that it’s been impossible for the

administration to not release the maximum amount of visas.”

Bray says another success story unfolded one county over from Montgomery County, Maryland, which banned the sale and use of pesticides. A neighboring county, Prince George’s County, wanted to enact the same legislation. Bray says this is why NALP is working to get pesticide preemption language in the 2023 Farm Bill — to prevent this from happening in the future.

“We mobilized, and over the course of about a six-week fight, we not only got all of our members engaged, we got their branches engaged,” he says.

NALP members in Prince George’s County communicated to their clients about how the proposed ban was unnecessary and would make it cost-prohibitive and difficult to continue to service lawns.

“I was on several calls where we had customers — not members of the industry

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— customers of our members of the industry, talking to members of Prince George’s council,” Bray says.

Sheppard, who was involved in the advocacy, says he saw firsthand how outreach to the council members illustrated how the proposed bill would have the opposite effect than what Prince George’s County intended.

“We were able to show them that their proposed ordinance, however well-intentioned, would directly undercut Maryland’s effective regulation and enforcement program leading to a less regulated and controlled environment,” Sheppard says.

And Bray says thanks to this advocacy, the bill was defeated.

“We got one of the people that sponsored the original ordinance to vote against it, which was noteworthy at the time,” he says. 📍

We want you

Both National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP) and Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE) offer members information to assist in their advocacy efforts.

NALP’s Voices for Healthy Green Spaces initiative shares information and success stories. RISE’s Grassroots Network connects professionals in the green industry with resources to help communicate the benefits the industry provides and share their knowledge.

“We are grassroots,” says Andrew Bray, NALP’s vice president of government relations. “We grow and maintain grass. We should have the strongest grassroots network out there. Voices for Healthy Green Spaces helps organize and activate that and point them in the right direction in a very efficient manner.”

Karen Reardon, vice president of public affairs for RISE, estimates there are around 80,000 jurisdictions in the U.S. She says the association can’t be everywhere all at once, so they need landscape professionals to step up.

“That’s a lot of ground to cover,” she says. “We can’t be everywhere.”



Voices for Healthy Green Spaces



RISE’s Grassroots Network



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HOW TO

GET IT RIGHT
Having a properly calibrated spreader means you won't over or underapply product.



Do you know the best practices for calibrating your spreaders?

Follow these tips to learn how to calibrate and maintain walk-behind spreaders

BY LAUREN DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR

As temps begin to rise, lawn care operators (LCOs) dust off their spreaders and ready them for the season. Compared to stand-on models, walk-behind spreaders can provide a higher level of maneuverability and also financial savings, says Jason Wilk, senior product manager for Echo.

“Walk-behind spreaders are more cost-effective, especially for commercial users that offer a lawn care treatment package but don’t offer the service as their primary business,” Wilk says. “Walk-behind spreaders can also be used in areas where some ride-on units may not be able to get to, such as a fenced-in yard with a standard gate opening.”

To ensure walk-behind spreaders provide consistent applications, LCOs must calibrate the equipment — and maintain them properly throughout the year.

EVEN APPLICATION

Before the season begins, LCOs need to calibrate their walk-on spreaders. Calibrating a spreader involves measuring the product output over a specific area to ensure a proper, even application, Wilk says.

Chemical manufacturers often provide the recommended spreader settings on the product label, which serve as a good starting point, says Christian

Jessel, equipment category manager at SiteOne Landscape Supply.

With that as the baseline, each spreader then needs to be calibrated. One method is the spread, sweep and weigh calibration method, usually on a concrete surface, Jessel says. This allows the operator to identify distribution issues with the spreader that require mechanical adjustment to the spread-pattern control system.

“They have to ensure that the amount of material that they are allowing to pass through the spreader opening is the exact desired amount — in pounds per 1,000 square feet or pounds per acre — according to the suggested application rates on the bag label,” Jessel says.

When done incorrectly, users can misapply a product — causing either too much or too little of the product to reach the turf.

“Too much can lead to extensive turf damage, while too little will provide weak results leading to some unhappy customers,” Wilk says.

After finishing an application, there should be little to no material left.

“If the material runs out too quickly or if you still have half or more material left over, the spreader will need to be readjusted and recalibrated,” Wilk says.

Over or underapplying materials can lead to callbacks, reapplications or damage to the area, Jessel says. Lawn striping can also occur when excess material is being spread heavily to one

side or the other of the spread pattern.

“Once calibrated properly, a unit should not require additional testing until the start of the next spread season,” Jessel says.

PROPER MAINTENANCE

To get the most from their equipment, LCOs also need to follow the manufacturer’s recommended maintenance schedule. That includes ensuring the tires have the correct air pressure, lubricating the grease fittings on the wheel axles or the gearcase once or twice a year and tightening the fasteners properly, Wilk says.

“When using harsh chemicals, it’s also recommended to rinse the unit with plain water, as some chemicals can cause rapid corrosion,” Wilk adds.

The most common cause of unexpected failures with a spreader’s hardware is not keeping it clean, Jessel says. Cleaning after each use helps avoid issues with sticking mechanisms or premature corrosion.

LCOs also must ensure the gearbox and transmission are in good working order, grease points are checked and lubed, the hopper isn’t damaged/missing parts and handles/handle grips are working properly.

“If installed, also check the side-deflector/baffle/side-shield operation,” Jessel says. “When these are needed, they must work.”



Christian Jessel

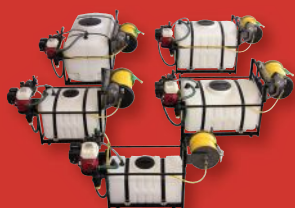


Jason Wilk

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.



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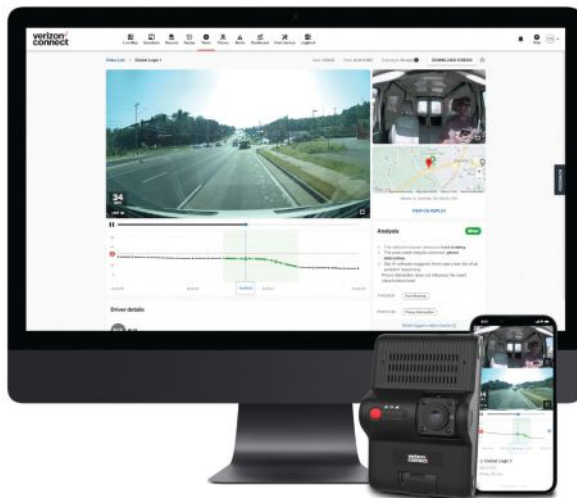
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ROAD SCHOLARS
According to a report from Verizon Connect, GPS tracking reduces accident costs by 15 percent and fuel costs by 11 percent.



How GPS provides fleet information at your fingertips

Learn ways this technology can cut costs and improve efficiency within your landscape ops

BY MIKE ZAWACKI | CONTRIBUTOR

A misconception among some landscape business owners and managers is that GPS fleet tracking is Big Brother babysitting drivers and crews out in the field. But today's GPS systems collect data to better inform contractors of critical in-the-field and job-site trends. They allow managers to make better-educated decisions on reducing operating costs and increasing efficiencies.

Ultimately, this technology allows contractors of all sizes to save money, extend service capabilities and provide more comprehensive customer service. Here are some ways GPS makes this possible.

ASSET MANAGEMENT

GPS technology expands beyond simple fleet tracking to provide landscape contractors with vital data for comprehensive asset management, says John Guerrieri, director of field operations deployment with Newport, Ky.-based Divisions Maintenance Group. Divisions, a property management company, offers services including commercial snow/ice removal, maintenance and tree care.

"You have a lot of expensive equipment and you're going to a lot of different sites," says Guerrieri, who adds that while Divisions Maintenance does not require its subcontractors to be GPS equipped, he strongly recommends vendors use GPS tracking on their vehicles and within the ops. "Tracking these assets is just as important as tracking the routes they're using to go from site to site."

DRIVER PERFORMANCE

GPS technology allows contractors to mitigate and prevent unsafe driver behaviors, unauthorized vehicle use and deviations from standard processes and procedures more effectively, all assisting with increasing efficiencies and strengthening the operation's bottom line.

"GPS tracking technology can reduce repair spend by coaching drivers on dangerous and damaging driving habits," says Ty Layman, senior adviser, product marketing at Verizon Connect. "Speeding, harsh braking and cornering, and quick starts can cause premature and aggravated vehicle wear-and-tear. With more stringent safety guidelines, they can prevent unexpected downtime and keep trucks on the road longer."



Ty Layman

COST REDUCTIONS

While there is an initial investment to incorporate the technology, there are significant financial and cost-saving returns for LCOs in the form of money saved on fuel, excessive idling, side trips, overtime/time sheet fraud and unnecessary maintenance.

According to Verizon Connect's Fleet Technology Trends Report, in 2022 and in the face of inflation, nearly half of the businesses surveyed used GPS tracking to reduce fuel consumption (46 percent) and accidents (46 percent), reporting an average 11 percent decrease in fuel costs and a 15-percent reduction in accident costs.

In addition to costs reduced by greater operational efficiencies, the improved focus on safety leads to fewer insurance claims and, as a result, lower premiums. Data-packed reports on driver performance and vehicle use offer attractive metrics for insurance agents to help negotiate reduced rates and discounts.

Ultimately, GPS technology pays for itself if contractors utilize it to become as efficient as possible.

"I would argue that the sooner you incorporate this technology into your operations, the faster and more efficient you become and the quicker you're able to grow," Guerrieri says. "So, look to GPS for asset management as well as fleet management, and everything else you can get from this technology is a bonus." 📍

Mike Zawacki is a Cleveland-based writer covering the landscape and turf industries for nearly two decades.



John Guerrieri

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FROM THE SOURCE

Why everything you know about spraying products bears repeating — again

BY BRETT CORBETT | CONTRIBUTOR

Spraying turf to control weeds, insects or diseases is like “déjà vu all over again.”

Sure, it's a well-known routine, but that's exactly why attention to detail is important every time you or any of your staff applies landscape management products. There are two important reasons for this vigilance:

1. To ensure the safety of people and the environment.
2. To maximize the performance and realize the full value of the products you use.

Join me in a brief review of best management practices for landscape management product applications on turf.



Brett Corbett

When it comes to target pests, product selection, equipment and application conditions, we want you to get the most out of every application.

PESTS AND PRODUCTS

Whether you're talking about weed, disease or insect control, it's critical to use a product specifically designed to provide the level of control you need.

Modern technology has improved the efficacy, efficiency and, in the best cases, cost-effectiveness of landscape management products. From single actives to products featuring multiple active ingredients, you have a wide range of options. These options are also a benefit when it comes to considerations for resistance management and application strategies.

Before using any product (here it comes): Always read and follow label directions. Déjà vu? Of course, and for very good reasons.

The label ensures you get the best results from the product while keeping yourself or your applicators safe. It also protects you from complaints should any problems occur. If you mix products, the label provides explicit information on compatibility and uniform mixing procedures.

Remember, water pH can affect both product efficacy and stability. Always adjust the pH level to match label recommendations. It's also important to check the label for information and requirements on using adjuvants (i.e., a surfactant, sticker or penetrant). Some products specify using a certain adjuvant or class of adjuvants and give precise instructions for mixing and agitation. Adjuvants can affect droplet size, evaporation rates and coverage to enhance product efficacy. They also can help reduce drift.

When you follow label application instructions and record your rates, dates, weather conditions and additional information like nozzle type, size and spray pressure, you have information that can protect you from situations, including performance issues and drift-related incidents.


EQUIPMENT AND APPLICATION

As you well know, equipment selection and setup are keys to a successful pesticide application. In lieu of creating a long list of sprayer types and specific functionalities, the best advice I can give is to use the appropriate spray equipment for each individual spray trip.

General maintenance and inspection of the entire sprayer system is a must before applying any product. All components — tank, nozzles, pump, gauges — should be checked for proper functionality. Again, this should be a routine procedure before and after each application.

One of the most significant components of an accurate and effective application is one of the smallest parts of the sprayer: the nozzle. Available in an assortment of sizes and types, select the proper nozzle for rate, pressure and speed as recommended on the product label. There is no universal nozzle, so be certain to use the right nozzle required for the specific product application. Nozzles are by no means maintenance-free. Check flow through on each nozzle by running clean water through the sprayer to ensure they are not damaged or plugged.

Another item on the checklist is calibration. Calibrate your sprayer to verify the accurate application rate in gallons per acre and to ensure the nozzle flow maintains the constant rate required by the product you intend to apply. For safety, use clean water to calibrate. Even if your sprayer comes with a rate controller, you should manually calibrate it before applying any product.

Finally, safety should always be your first priority. Always use the required personal protection equipment and apply both common sense and good sense before you start the spraying process. 



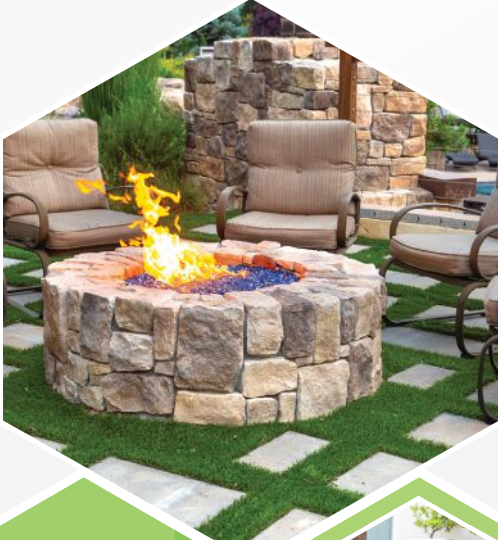
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IRRIGATION

Are those brown spots on the turf caused by billbugs or another pest?

When scouting, learn to make an accurate diagnosis and save valuable time and resources

BY MIKE ZAWACKI | CONTRIBUTOR

It's a routine service call. The client has islands of dead turf littering the yard. It's a no-brainer for an experienced lawn care operator (LCO). A hot early spring coupled with recent precipitation makes these unsightly spots the likely symptoms of early onset summer or brown patch. From the truck, you determine that a fungicide treatment should set this right.

But not so fast. Those ugly spots on the Kentucky bluegrass lawn could point to turfgrass pathogens, overfertilization or improper chemical applications. Or they could be signs of billbugs.

An incorrect diagnosis is a waste of time, money and resources. Here's how to better determine whether billbugs are at the heart of your turf problem.

GET DOWN AND DIRTY

First and foremost, turf experts recommend LCOs avoid diagnosing from the curb.

"No. 1, get out of your truck," says Richard Fletcher, a turf and ornamentals technical services manager for Nufarm. "No. 2, get down on your hands and knees because you have to figure out why (the turf) died."

The best way to determine the problem is to take a sample of damaged turf between your thumb and index finger and pull upward.

"If it comes up fairly easily, then there's a good chance (damage) could be related to billbug feeding," says Matt Giese, a Midwest turfgrass technical field manager for Syngenta.

Examine the stems of that sample

closely to see if they're hollowed out and appear ragged or chewed on the bottom. While hollow stems are a telltale sign of billbug larvae feeding, the clincher is the presence of frass, a fine, sawdust-like material. Further investigation into the soil profile will reveal white larvae.

"You have to dig around a little bit in the turf to be sure you can rule (billbugs) out," Giese says.

KNOW YOUR BUGS

In cool-season turf, the bluegrass billbug overwinters as an adult, emerges in the spring as soil temperatures increase and then lays an egg in a slit it cuts into a turf stem. The larvae emerge and gorge on stem tissue until they're big enough to pupate into adult billbugs. Then, with the season's first intense bout of heat, the damaged plant can't get enough water, so it browns and dies.

By comparison, the warm-season and transition-zone billbugs — predominantly hunting billbugs, but also lesser and unequal billbugs — can overwinter as both adults and larvae,



depending on the soil temperature and proximity to the transition zone. Overwintered hunting billbug larvae emerge early in the spring to do damage, and adult billbugs spawn a new generation of larvae later into the summer. This generational overlap is responsible for confusion and misdiagnosis among LCOs managing warm-season turf, such as zoysiagrass.

"When you get a certain soil temperature — 55 to 60 degrees F — the billbug larvae start to get active and feed on the crowns ... which means you now have crown damage opportunities before the turf has even broke dormancy," says Fletcher.

SCOUTING FOR BILLBUGS

Both bluegrass and hunting billbug life cycles follow a seasonal calendar of sorts. Therefore, historical data on emergence and treatment help LCOs make accurate diagnoses.

"While you can base (diagnosis and treatment) on a calendar, it probably needs to be a loose association knowing there are additional factors — growing-degree day units and thresholds — that can help guide LCOs for when they need to go out and start scouting," Giese says.

As part of this scouting strategy, Giese recommends a pitfall trap — a disposable cup buried flush in the turf. After a few days, adult billbugs will fall into the cup and can't get out.

"If you have a history of billbugs in your turf, you can monitor how many adults you find," he adds. "If you're not finding very many, then maybe there are not that many there, or they're just not active yet." 🐜

Mike Zawacki is a Cleveland-based writer covering the landscape and turf industries for nearly two decades.

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THE BIG ONE

Where the garden grows

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

LOCATION Houston


COMPANY Grow & Company

DETAILS Grow & Company has maintained the project since its installation. Goals for the residential installation project included creating a lush garden with plants acclimated to the Houston climate.

Kyle Cahill, founder of Grow & Company, says the space backs up to a heavily wooded area with a lot of shade. Danny McNair, lead designer for Grow & Company, needed to address runoff and irrigation of the terraces to create the lush gardens the client desired.

“We really feel like you get a botanical garden experience walking through the space with all of the different types of plants. Throughout the season there are plants that go dormant in the winter that come up through the ground cover in the spring that you just didn’t know were there,” Cahill says. “The homeowner gets to experience the garden throughout the year as it changes and grows.”

Other challenges include significant shade in the backyard from a large oak tree and scale issues on the property’s camellias.

Grow & Company won a Gold Award from the 2022 National Association of Landscape Professionals’ Awards of Excellence program for this project. 

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



Captions | **1.** Grow & Company continues to maintain this property following installation. The client wanted the property to have lush plantings and feel like a botanical garden. **2.** The client also wanted the design to showcase hedges and colorful plantings. **3.** Grow & Company maintains the garden, which features a mix of plantings best suited for the Houston heat.



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IRON WORKHORSES

What to know when closing in on a blower purchase

Backpack and handheld blowers both have advantages. Which one is best for you?

BY ROB DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Blowers are a key piece of many maintenance jobs. They offer an effective way for contractors to move materials like grass, leaves and more. With efficiency as crucial as ever, they are a time-saving machine for crews.

John Powers, director of product management at Echo, and Jeff Taylor, product services manager for Stihl, offer tips on how to decide if a backpack

or handheld blower is best for your maintenance operation.

WHAT'S IT FOR?

The No. 1 thing to know before you purchase a blower — either of the handheld or backpack variety — is what jobs crews will use them for the most.

“There are several things to consider, including power and versatility,” says Taylor. “If you plan to use your



blower for extended periods of time, a backpack blower can provide a more comfortable design. A backpack blower is also good if you have a large clearing site or if you need to move wet leaves and other heavy debris.”

Taylor says handheld blowers are solid options for contractors who need to blow grass clippings off small areas like driveways, sidewalks and patios.

PHOTO: STIHL



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COMFORT AND POWER
Manufacturers design backpack blowers to provide comfort even on time-intensive jobs.

They also weigh less than their backpack counterparts. Although handhelds are lighter and easier to transport,

Taylor says backpack blowers are still the preferred option for many jobs.

“The weight is evenly distributed on the user’s back, making them more comfortable to carry,” he says. “(A backpack blower) will also offer a higher blowing force (newtons) and air velocity (mph) than a handheld blower.”

WHAT ELSE?

In terms of output, Powers says the difference between a backpack and a handheld blower is significant.

“They’re usually multiple times more powerful. We’re not talking just 10 or 20 percent,” he says. “Because of that power difference, (backpack blowers) are significantly better for moving heavier material or clearing off larger areas.”

Another significant difference between the two options is price. Generally, handheld blowers are less expensive than backpack blowers. Taylor says a heavy-duty commercial handheld blower will typically run equivalent in cost to an entry-level backpack blower.



John Powers

Powers suggests having a mix of both types of blowers available for crews in case their routes or properties require both.

“Sometimes it’s a good idea to have a mix (of both handheld and backpack), and we’ve seen contractors who do that to cover all of their bases,” he says.

CHARGED AND READY

Although traditional gas-powered backpack blowers remain popular with contractors, their battery-powered equivalents have continued to gain popularity.

“The industry continues to make advancements on the battery side to provide the power and run times needed for working professionals,” says Taylor. “Battery technology is advancing as well with the development of power-laminate cell technology.”

While that technology is indeed advancing, Powers believes there’s still a long way to go. Much of that gap between gas and battery comes from energy density, he says.

“The issue is run time, and a lot of that comes down to just the energy density of lithium-ion batteries versus gas,” he says. “Gas is much more energy dense, which allows gas backpack blowers to have longer runtimes because they’re able to carry more energy in the fuel tank relative to a battery.”



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RECOMMENDER

What is your **top truck accessory** for maintenance jobs?



Berry Strickland of Intracoastal Landscape Designs says this truck dump body helps make his crews more efficient.



MIKE MCCARRON

OWNER
IMAGWORKS LANDSCAPE
MANAGEMENT
FAIRFAX STATION, VA.

A major change that we made to our trucks this season was to use a spool rack holder with a built-in cutting knife. This style of rack can be wall mounted and it can handle up to a 5-pound spool of trimmer line. The knife is attached to the side of the holder and it's simple to use for our crews as it cuts with a simple pull handle. To make sure our crews get the correct length of line, we have a mark on the wall inside of our trailer that's the exact length needed for a size cut each time. It's really simple and fast to use and it ensures we get the correct size every time we need it. It helps us save time because crews don't have to go looking for a knife and/or wonder what length to cut at. It's been a huge time saver for only \$39.



BERRY STRICKLAND

PRESIDENT AND CEO
INTRACOASTAL
LANDSCAPE DESIGNS
TABOR CITY, N.C.

We recently bought a 2022 Dodge 5500 and we had a customized dump body put on it. It's unique because not only does it dump in the back, it has three different ways of opening. We had this one built so both sides of the truck will do the same thing. That's been a huge time-saver as far as loading and unloading since everything is hydraulic. We bought the truck from a local Dodge dealership and they had the body sent elsewhere to have the dump modification installed. Along with that, we had high-definition cameras installed to help us with hooking up trailers.



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It's a unique truck accessory, but we utilize a DJI Mini 3 Pro Drone. Drones are a great way to quickly and easily survey a property. It allows you to gather important information about the size of the property and any potential issues you might run into that you're not able to see from the ground. It's also great to make more accurate estimates. This saves you time and money and allows you to take on more jobs in a shorter amount of time. Additionally, in less of a maintenance capacity, drones can provide unique marketing opportunities for your business. By using drones to capture aerial footage of your completed projects, you can create impressive marketing materials that will help you stand out from your competitors.



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HARDSCAPE SOLUTIONS

Take it up a level

BY ROB DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

LOCATION Leesburg, Va.

COMPANY Kane Landscapes

DETAILS A drastic slope presented the biggest challenge for Kane Landscapes in the execution of this project.

Josh Kane, president and head designer of Kane Landscapes, says crews utilized more than 3,600 cubic yards of fill soil to level the backyard. Much of the soil came from a nearby construction project that was looking to get rid of soil, Kane says.

“The clients wanted to be able to walk around the grounds and have a cutting garden,” he says. “Filling in someone’s backyard with tens of thousands of dollars in soil can be a tough pill to swallow, but this client knew just what they wanted.”

In the front of the home, Kane Landscapes installed a pair of bluestone patios dotted with mondo grass to soften the edges of the large stones.

At the clients’ request, Kane kept things simple in the backyard gardens and opted for natural materials, such as granite cobblestone and gravel.

“They wanted something that felt more like something you’d see in the country,” says Kane. “So that’s a three-quarter inch decorative gravel on a compacted 21-A base.”

Other complications included the delayed delivery of the granite fountain for the backyard garden. Kane says the fountain, which weighs more than 12,000 pounds, was placed piece-by-piece by a crane following the garden installation.

This project won Kane Landscapes a Gold Award from the 2022 National Association of Landscape Professionals’ Awards of Excellence Program. 🏆

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



Captions | **1.** The clients requested a low-profile backyard design with walkways leading to cutting gardens and benches. **2.** Kane Landscapes needed thousands of cubic yards of soil to level the project’s backyard. **3.** One of two bluestone patios and walkways the clients wanted to remain open with plenty of sight lines. **4.** Flagstone accents the gravel paths on the back patio that overlooks the garden and fountain.

PHOTOS COURTESY OF:
KANE LANDSCAPES

PRODUCTS THAT WORK

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COMPANY: Unilock

URL: Unilock.com

Fine blasting of the stone's surface creates Arcana's silky, matte texture and speckled color palette, exposing a combination of natural granite, quartz and marble particles. Patios, pool surrounds, walkways, roof decks and overlay projects are suited for these large-format slabs. Arcana features a non-slip surface sealed with EasyClean, which protects the surface from stains, a benefit when using Arcana in outdoor dining areas and high-traffic commercial projects.



THERMAL FLAGSTONE



COMPANY: Kafka Granite

URL: KafkaGranite.com

Kafka's Thermal Flagstone is a natural stone alternative to manufactured hardscapes, available as irregular-edged flagstone or as a repeating pattern of sawn flagstone. Each stone has a sawn height with 1/2-inch tolerance to cut down on sorting and installation time while limiting shimming and releveling. The top surface of each unit also has a thermal finish to provide additional traction and accentuate the character of the natural stone.

Continued on page 38

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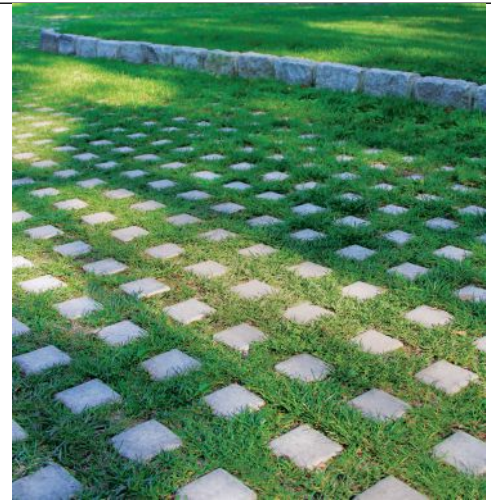
Continued from page 37

CHECKER BLOCK

COMPANY: Nicolock

URL: Nicolock.com

Checker Block waffle-shaped concrete grid paving stones cover approximately 25 percent of the designated surface area, which allows grass to grow in the gaps. The design also helps with drainage in wet areas. With a flat surface and slightly rounded edges, it's safe to walk, bike or drive on Checker Block pavers.



SAWN FLAGSTONE

COMPANY: Delgado Stone

URL: DelgadoStone.com

Gauged to 2 inches thick, Sawn Palletized Flagstone features irregular sides and offers 65-75 square feet of coverage per pallet. These pieces fit in several landscape and outdoor designs, including walkways, pool coping and patios. The stones come in a wide range of color collections — including the Old New England Wall Collection (pictured), which highlights earth tones, grays and browns. This material pairs the natural beauty of flagstone with the ease of installing gauged pieces.

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WATER WORLD

Work in progress

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

LOCATION Portland, Ore.

COMPANY Pacific Landscape Management

DETAILS Pacific Landscape Management’s installation project at a local community college is unique. It is part of a learning opportunity for Portland Community College students.

“We bid this job to basically put in the foundation to an irrigation system — a two-wire irrigation system — through the grounds within the campus,” says Doug Crimin, an area manager with Pacific Landscape Management. “We’re just laying the foundation and getting the main lines and everything else in. That way, they can run with what we leave them.”

Crimin said Pacific Landscape Management will install around 37 valves and several quick couplers when the project wraps up within a few weeks.

“Future irrigation classes will go zone by zone and run all of the laterals and place all the heads and then tie the system into the valve, which will already be in place,” he says. “They learn how to run a two-wire system with decoders.”

Crimin says Pacific Landscape Management will work with the community college to adjust the system when needed as the student installation progresses.

“We’ll help monitor things and make sure that everything is operationally sound and working as it should,” he says. “As new technology emerges, we’ll also help the students with replacing things like pressure-regulated heads and anything that makes the system more efficient.”



Captions | 1. This job site is at a local community college where students studying irrigation design will complete the irrigation system installation. **2.** Pacific Landscape Management installed the main lines and valves for this two-wire system that runs through campus. **3.** Students will eventually go zone by zone and install laterals and heads and tie them into the system.

Get your project featured

Did your company recently complete a noteworthy irrigation project? Do you have photos? We want to hear about it! Email Editor Christina Herrick at cherrick@northcoastmedia.net to have your company’s irrigation project featured in our Water World section.



DON'T MISS 
It's crucial to know thresholds for zone sizes to ensure proper head-to-head coverage.

EXPERTS' TIPS

Tips to choose the right nozzles and heads

Consistent coverage is the key for selecting the right products for each individual job site

BY LAUREN DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR

With water conservation top of mind, irrigation professionals seek to install the right combination of heads and nozzles on each site to position themselves as water management experts.

That goal requires them to gather site-specific information, according to Arianne Williams and Gracie Duarte, product managers at Rain Bird. Irrigation professionals need to consider a site's design, soil type, terrain, water source, climates, size and shape of the area, compatibility of the components used on the same valve and the operational goals.

The irrigation components must have a performance range that fits within the available flow and pressure criteria, they add. On sites with high water pressure, pressure-regulating sprayheads can help

avoid issues like misting and fogging. Technicians should pay attention to the varying needs in terms of hydraulics, local government restrictions and the customers' wants as well, Williams says.

FACTOR IN ENVIRONMENT

Effective irrigation system designs must have head-to-head coverage and consistent distribution uniformity, says Michael Derewenko, Jain Irrigation solutions manager. Contractors need to consider the amount of site traffic and environmental variables like wind and sun coverage. There should be some overlap to prevent dry spots and account for wind.

Before installation, professionals should reference a spec chart to understand the operating pressures for

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different nozzles. For example, streaming rotor nozzles provide a slower, more consistent application of water to help cut through the wind, Derewenko says.

Technicians should space the sprinkler heads for the proper head-to-head coverage using a safety buffer based on site conditions like wind, says Kelsey Jacquard, category manager for mechanical irrigation products at Hunter Industries.

“The distances provided by the manufacturer are in no-wind, perfect conditions,” she says.

Selecting the right sprinkler heads and nozzles will determine whether the irrigation system functions properly, manages water effectively and maintains a healthy landscape. In addition to knowing the available pressure and flow for the system, professionals must consider the landscape size to set the head spacing for good coverage, Jacquard says. The plant material on site also

will determine the sprinkler pop-up height and water application.

MISTAKES TO AVOID

Common mistakes irrigation professionals make when selecting nozzles and heads include oversizing the zone for the available pressure and spacing the heads too far apart, Jacquard says.

“Knowing the available pressure and flow for a site provides the upper threshold for the size of the zone,” Jacquard says. “Include a safety buffer of at least 75 percent for available flow, and calculate the number of heads for the zone using the nozzle flow information from the manufacturer.”


After installation, contractors should run the system to ensure they’ve achieved head-to-head coverage—and ask customers to watch the system run once a week to note issues. Contractors also should monitor plant health.

“Dry or yellowing patches of grass in between heads or unusually green or soggy spots indicate that some areas are getting too little or too much water,” Duarte says. “Another telltale sign can be patches of mold, mildew, fungus or water pooling in caused by overirrigating.”

When contractors find a product they like, it can be tempting to use it for every project.

“It may be a comfortable choice, but it might not be the best one for a particular application,” Duarte says.

Irrigation contractors should also pay attention to every site’s variations so they don’t max out the number of heads on a zone or space them too far apart.

“The goal is to maintain a properly functioning irrigation system with effective water use, all while keeping the landscape healthy,” Jacquard says. 

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.

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FIVE QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Tony Distefano

OWNER AND PRESIDENT
ANGELO'S LANDSCAPE GROUP
BATON ROUGE, LA.

1 What should I know about Angelo's Landscape Group?

It was started in 1983. This is our 40th year in business. My parents, Angelo and Trish, started it as a small maintenance company. It's grown bit by bit over the years. In the 1990s, they added commercial landscape installations for existing clients. I graduated from Louisiana State University in 2004 with a degree in landscape architecture. After I graduated, we started offering design services in-house, and started doing design/build. We're excited about our continued growth. It's definitely changed over the years and grown a tremendous amount.

2 What are your expectations for the industry in 2023 and beyond?

The term I've heard is 'cautiously optimistic.' That's how I feel. I think our industry is going in a fantastic direction. The way people look at us, we're not just grass cutters anymore; we're complete landscape professionals. Call it the HGTV craze, call it what you want; the bottom line is there's a greater appreciation for outdoor spaces. Even on the commercial level, our clients understand the importance of hiring true landscape professionals to care for their properties instead of the cut-blow-go guys. They realize, if the landscape looks bad, it's a direct reflection of the professionalism of the business inside.

3 What is your most memorable day at work?

As we have become more focused on our people and culture, we started doing an employee appreciation field day every year. We do it on the Friday before Thanksgiving. We have a lot of vendors that sponsor the event; this year we had more door prizes than we had employees. We'll have a weed-eating competition and sack races. This (past) year we had a human foosball game, which was hilarious. It's fun to see grown men acting like 10-year-olds and just giggling, smiling and laughing. To see the joy on all of our

employees' faces on that day is worth it every time. Every year that we do it, that is my new favorite day.

4 Do you have a family?

I've been married for 18 years to my lovely wife, Ashley. We have two children, a boy and a girl. Gabrielle is 15, she'll be 16 this summer. Anthony Jr. is 17. Both of them are very much into athletics. He's a football player and she's a soccer player. It definitely keeps us busy on weekends, with their games, training and practice. But I hear from many people who say I'll miss it when it's over, so we try to soak it up, as hectic as teenage parenting can be. We try to enjoy it and have them and their friends to the house as much as possible.

5 You are part of the ACE Peer Group with McFarlin Stanford, and just hosted a group. How did that group handle a crawfish boil?

We had guys here from Alaska, Boston, St. Louis, Indianapolis, Seattle, Wisconsin — from all over. You know what, I married a Cajun, she just dove right in there and showed the guys how to peel crawfish. They were a bunch of students, just watching her. My kids assisted in the training. We got some of it on video, it was pretty entertaining. At first, they were pretty timid, you know, 'We're eating mud bugs!' But once they realized how good they actually are, they really dove in there. 🍷

BEST ADVICE

"Hire for attitude and not skill. You can teach skill, but attitude is contagious in an unhealthy way and can spread like a bad virus. Hire people with great attitude and a positive outlook, then teach skills on top of that."



PHOTO: ANGELO'S LANDSCAPE GROUP



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.

Detailing the eye-opening results from my Financial Master Class

As a consultant, entrepreneur and investor, I've had a passion for business and finance my entire life. It started at the family dinner table and continued through business school. It has come full circle with my Financial Master Class for the landscape industry I hold each January.

This year, almost 200 landscape professionals participated in this two-day interactive event. They provided their operation's 12-month P/L, divisional direct costs, balance sheet, pricing, markups and staffing data.

We processed it all and delivered back a practical benchmarking tool that attendees use to compare their numbers against the average and the high achievers — those in the top 20 percent. We subdivided benchmarks by revenue: under \$1 million, \$1 million to \$5 million, \$5 million to \$10 million and \$10 million-plus.

We carved out 13 important key performance indicators (KPIs) and over two half-day sessions, we discussed all the details and gave conclusions and recommendations.

It wasn't just all numbers, however. We made time for attendee networking and short talks on related topics, plus guest speaker Charlie Hall, Ph.D., shared his 2023 economic predictions. Lastly, I held a Q&A session on critical business issues: incentives, staffing, growth, open book management and more.

5 TAKEAWAYS

While there were far too many to share, here are five takeaways from our 2022 study:

1 Profit vs. growth: We found no direct correlation between profit

and growth. Some of the most profitable firms were also the fastest growing in the study. Of course, the more you reinvest your profits, the less you will show. But do not assume you have to grow slowly to be profitable.

2 Gross profit margin (GPM):


There is a large gap in GPM between the average and the high achievers. Design/build showed a gap of 10 points in gross profit. Maintenance showed a gap of 12 points. Enhancements showed a whopping gap of 17 points. Many discovered they leave money on the table.

3 Overhead staffing: We found no correlation between overhead staffing and profitability. Companies ranged from very fat (1:1 overhead to direct-labor ratio), all the way to super lean (1:10 ratio). We saw high profits on both ends of the spectrum! This confirms that you should not be afraid of staffing for growth. Just make sure your total payroll and margin goals are in line. Staying too lean can mean not enough oversight and loss of profit opportunities. Find the right ratio for your business mix.

4 Labor markup: We measured how much participants marked up the labor in each division. There is

an astonishing range of companies in our industry. For example, hardscaping labor markups ranged from 1.5 times all the way to 4.5 times. Consider aiming for a minimum markup of 3 times on average (your operation may be lower in commercial mowing but higher in enhancements). Use overhead recovery on your labor as a guiding light.

5 Net profit: The average net profit was 8.4 percent, yet the high achievers hit 18.9 percent. That's a 10.5-point swing. Keep in mind 10 percent of attendees did better than 18.9 percent. I have shown contractors for years how to aim for 20 percent net profit in residential and closer to 15 percent in commercial. Though, I have clients that do even better. The proof is in the pudding. Aim high, hit high.

The more you dive into your numbers, the better your budgets, goals and results will be. Don't set an artificial target based on what you hear on the street. The average firm is underperforming. Go to JeffreyScott.biz/PeerGroup for more info on my high-impact peer groups where we take benchmarking and finances seriously. 





BY JEFF KORHAN

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

Unlock the power of AI tools to make your business smarter

Artificial intelligence (AI) technology has been quietly working for more than a decade to interact with website visitors and predict buying behavior. Since the introduction of ChatGPT and its deep learning capabilities late last year, it seems the world has suddenly awakened to AI's true potential.

If you aren't familiar with AI, it is the science of making machines smarter. Deep learning is the AI breakthrough that made ChatGPT the fastest platform to reach one million users, something it accomplished in just a few days. The current buzz around deep learning is how it gives these platforms human-like qualities. What's exciting is we are still in the early stages of deep learning.

Skeptics are quick to note AI's occasional inaccuracies, but it's important to remember that with greater experience, the system gets smarter. If used for selling, the more data a deep learning tool consumes, the smarter it gets. The smarter it gets, the more it sells. The more it sells, the more data it consumes, and so on.

Most AI platforms do not have a steep learning curve or price point. ChatGPT is free, but many people pay a small monthly fee to test a wide range of business applications.

HOW TO USE CHATGPT AND SIMILAR APPLICATIONS

Let's talk about smarter. We all get smarter with practice and experience, but the best of us gets smarter faster from the deep learning that comes from diverse experiences. That's exactly how deep learning AI tools work, with the difference being

they can process millions of layers of data in a short period of time.

Get started collaborating with ChatGPT to solve common and recurring business problems. Using its data-driven, predictive approach, it can solve problems and automate solutions along these lines:

- Delivering accurate estimates and forecasts;
- Predicting customer insights;
- Minimizing execution missteps and delays;
- Accelerating project mobilization;
- Focusing customer communications; and
- Improving first impressions and follow-ups.

CONTEXT MATTERS

The trick to getting useful results is phrasing your questions as you would for any other expert. Be clear and specific about desired outcomes. Avoid the mistake of approaching ChatGPT as you would Google or any other search engine. The more human your query, the more human the response. You can accomplish this by providing context tailored to your situation.

For example, you can ask ChatGPT for the top customer concerns

in your industry segment. Then get solutions by asking the AI to "think like the marketing manager of a landscaping company."

Here are other useful prompts for getting targeted information:

- Compared to;
- In the style of;
- Step-by-step;
- For beginners; and
- Considering.

Use the prompt "in the style of," to pattern solutions to the distinctive style of a well-known person. For example, you could ask it to rewrite your project proposal into a one-page memo in the style of Amazon founder Jeff Bezos.

ChatGPT gave me the following when I inquired about Bezos' legendary one-page memo structure. "Bezos begins with a clear and concise statement of the issue at hand, followed by a detailed explanation of the problem, the proposed solution and the expected outcome."


All of this will become clear as you experiment with the hundreds of AI tools expected to be released this year. For now, get your feet wet by getting smarter with ChatGPT. 



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GROW WITH GRUNDER

BY MARTY GRUNDER

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



Steps we're taking to grow leaders in our operation

Exponential growth has been the name of the game for many landscaping companies in recent years. Acquisitions, market expansions and added services are all on the table. As companies grow, we also see an age-old problem reappear. We need more managers who we can count on to maintain our company culture, teach their direct reports the skills they need and effectively manage time and resources to be successful.

We see this at Grunder Landscaping Co., too. As we grow, we need to trust more people in leadership positions to make bigger decisions. We grew by 40 percent last year, and we plan to grow by another 25 percent in 2023. While we're making plans to ensure we have the equipment and labor we need to do that, we're also taking steps to identify and prepare the emerging leaders we'll need as the team grows. Here's how:

1 TEACH SOFT SKILLS

I've written about the importance of soft skills before, but training our entire team is like a prep course for management promotions.

You must have great soft skills to be an effective manager, and this is a way we can help our entire team to be better at the jobs they have now, but also prepare for their future position changes. We know not everyone has them, so we train on them. Being able to connect with team members and clients,



Read my column on soft skills here.

“Investing in your team is the No. 1 thing I would recommend every landscape professional in America do this season.”

manage conflict and be self-aware are the simple building blocks of a good manager.

2 LOOK INTERNALLY

We look to promote from within more often than we hire someone from outside the company to fill a management opening. We constantly evaluate the men and women on our crews to see who we think has potential for other positions within the company. And we make sure those individuals get the training and mentorship they need to have the skills we're looking for when the job opening appears.

A great example is one of our salespeople, Brent. Brent was an exceptional team leader for us for years, and he was so good at finding and suggesting enhancements for the properties he cared for that it was wearing out our sales team. He moved into an open maintenance sales role a few years ago, and it's such a great fit. He had an eye for projects and he's great with clients, too. The years he spent in the field prepared him for the role he's in now.

Our mission statement at GLC is all about creating opportunities for our team, and if we want our team members to believe we mean it, they need to see examples of us promoting from within.

3 SET CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

GLC's Chief Operating Officer Seth Pflum likes to remind our team members that to be promoted, they need to take initiative. He expects them to learn skills for the job they want while doing their current job—and while training a replacement.

During annual reviews, we are very clear about what skills we want to see a team member develop to earn a promotion. It may be getting certifications, practicing a technique or improving in an area of their work. These steps will prepare them for the next job, and mentoring their replacement is a great way to develop management skills and transfer knowledge.

Investing in your team is the No. 1 thing I would recommend every landscape professional in America do this season. No matter how busy you are, you're never too busy to invest in your people. In my experience, it's an investment that always pays dividends.

As you look at the summer ahead, search for opportunities to invest in your team. Look for education opportunities locally, develop them internally or join us at this summer's Field Trip we hold in partnership with the National Association of Landscape Professionals. This year we're visiting Russell Landscape in Atlanta, June 6-7. I hope you'll join me: [GrowGroupInc.com/NALP-Field-Trip](https://www.growgroupinc.com/NALP-Field-Trip).



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