



LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

REAL-WORLD SOLUTIONS™

MAS VERDE – WITH LESS WATER – POR FAVOR

Three companies, including Maas Verde in Central Texas, discuss how they overcame irrigation nightmares

2023
IRRIGATION
SHOW
ISSUE



November 2023 VOL 62, ISSUE 11

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Three companies, including Maas Verde in Central Texas, discuss how they overcame irrigation nightmares

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Build your 2024 growth strategy and the plan to achieve it.

Gain valuable insights from industry veteran Mark Bradley, who built a \$50M landscaping business from scratch. Join us for an in-depth exploration of hiring, staff management, sales, operations, eliminating inefficiencies, and measuring your results.

Discover how technology can revolutionize your business by automating these processes. You will leave with your 2024 growth strategy and the plan to achieve it.

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Maximizing Efficiency in Landscaping: A Conversation with Justin Siemens of JC Landscaping



Q: Justin, could you give our readers a brief overview of your journey in the landscaping industry?

A: Of course. I'm Justin Siemens, the president of JC Landscaping. Our venture began in 1999, and by 2004, we were an incorporated entity. From our humble beginnings in lawn care, we've branched out into construction, experiencing growth every year. In 2010, we attended an LMN seminar down at Landscape Ontario, and got signed up then and there. That helped our growth to where we are now.

Today, we boast five design-build crews, four lawn care teams, and a localized snow division. Our primary aim is delivering an unparalleled customer experience, backed by innovative project management tools.

Q: The landscaping industry is competitive. What makes JC Landscaping stand out?

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"With tools like LMN, businesses can ensure every project facet is meticulously accounted for, paving the way for growth and success."

Justin Siemens
President
JC Landscaping

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A: Our crews have greatly benefited from LMN's real-time tracking and planning features. These tools empower them to monitor their progress, ensuring accountability and fostering a sense of ownership. They love being able to clock in, add their project notes and pictures, and it helps us keep a whole pulse on where everyone is at and what they're doing.



The real win is the drastic reduction in end-of-day paperwork, allowing our teams to wrap up efficiently and head home to their families.

Q: Implementing new software often leads to new insights. What revelations has LMN brought to light about JC Landscaping?

A: Adopting LMN was like shining a spotlight on our operations. We quickly identified areas that were bogged down by inefficiencies, particularly in data management and cross-referencing. With LMN, these redundancies were quickly eliminated. The software's comprehensive approach ensures we never miss out on billable items, significantly boosting our revenue.

Q: For businesses contemplating integrating LMN, what words of wisdom can you share?

A: It's all about the experience. While there are numerous talented professionals in our field, we pride ourselves on the consistent and transparent communication we offer our clients. It's not just about laying the best patios; it's about ensuring our clients feel valued and informed every step of the way.

Q: You've mentioned the LMN software. How has it reshaped your business operations?

A: LMN has been nothing short of revolutionary for us. I'm definitely a numbers guy, so I love the budgeting aspects. It seamlessly integrates various facets of our business, from budgeting to estimating — with every piece ensuring a smooth workflow. The software's capability to transition from client presentations to crew assignments without a hitch has significantly enhanced our efficiency.



Q: Efficiency is crucial in any business. Could you dive deeper into the efficiency gains JC Landscaping has experienced with LMN?

A: One of the most tangible benefits has been in payroll processing. In the past, handling time cards for a team of 10 was a task that consumed more than an hour. I remember sitting in my truck with all of the written time cards and calling crew members on the phone to ask them questions and cross reference things.

Now, even with our expanded team of 40, the entire process takes just 10 minutes a day.

Additionally, our estimators, equipped with LMN, can churn out detailed quotes for substantial projects in record time. You can import so much data into LMN, and once it's set up, you can turn around large quotes in a very short amount of time. This newfound speed allows them to redirect their focus towards enriching the customer journey.



Q: Crews are the backbone of any landscaping company. How has LMN impacted your ground teams?

A: Change is hard for most people. However, the initial effort invested in mastering LMN is dwarfed by the huge returns. The software not only streamlines operations, but also offers invaluable insights during its implementation. Once you're past the initial setup, LMN virtually self-manages and you'll never look back. It delivers an impressive return on our investment.

Q: Before we wrap up, could you highlight your favorite feature in LMN and its impact?

A: While I'm personally fond of the budgeting tool, the scorecards have truly been a game-changer. They offer a comprehensive view of our projects, enabling us to track progress and celebrate milestones collectively. This feature not only boosts team morale, but also fosters a culture of accountability and excellence.

Q: Any other thoughts for our readers?

A: In the dynamic world of landscaping, consistency is key. With tools like LMN, businesses can ensure every project facet is meticulously accounted for, paving the way for growth and success. Embracing such innovations is not just a choice; it's a strategic move towards a brighter future.

LMN has supported the craftsmanship of companies like JC Landscaping since 2009.

If you're not currently with LMN, it's maybe time to take a look at what we can do to enable you, your company, and employees to do their best work everyday.

What's your next step and vision for your company's future? LMN can help you get there. Connect with us to chat and feel free to take a test drive of our software.

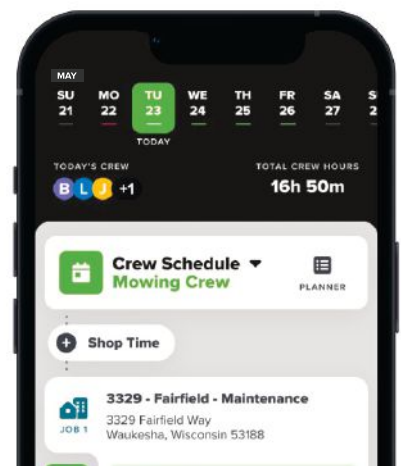
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What do you see in store for 2024?

Our December issue will feature our battery-powered guide and our annual state of the industry reports. Have you implemented battery-powered equipment this year? Or do you have any thoughts on how next year will shape up for the green industry?

If so, send a note to Editor Christina Herrick at cherrick@northcoastmedia.net and your story could be featured in the next issue of *Landscape Management* magazine.



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SETH JONES
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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via Twitter @sethajones.



Memories of Equip Exposition '23

Hat's off to the Equip Exposition app. I take back the bad things I muttered under my breath as it led me past the Hardscapes North America area of the Kentucky Exposition Center, then past Freedom Hall. If I were driving a car, I surely would have pulled over by then, thinking I entered the address incorrectly and I was about to drive off a cliff.

But the app told me to keep going. Booth No. 42627 — I didn't recall seeing a booth number like that at Equip Exposition ever before. But as I walked around the other side of Freedom Hall, an 18,000-seat arena, signs urged me that I was on the right track to see the West Wing.

The app was right. I walked into a completely new, to me, wing of the KEC and saw about 100 booths sprawled out. Soon, I was in the Ironcraft booth, interviewing Mike Kucharski, vice president of sales and marketing. The company started as Titan Implements in 2014 but rebranded to Ironcraft last

“I saw one person eagerly raise his hand every time I opened it back up to questions. I gave him a nod and knew I wanted to end with his question, whatever it was.”

year to avoid confusion with a similarly named company. I looked long and hard at the company's tree reaper (looks wicked and I'm vying for a live demo on my land) and then interviewed Kucharski for *Landscape Management* TV (that interview is on our YouTube channel now.)

Now that I was in the West Wing, I had to look around. I said hello to my neighbors at PBI-Gordon, whose headquarters is less than 30 minutes from where I live. I checked out the new product pavilion. I took a minute to take in a drone class. And since no one was looking, I picked up a 7-iron and took three swings on a golf simulator to see if I could walk away with a closest-to-the-pin prize (no surprise; I didn't).

The 2023 Equip Exposition was memorable for many reasons. The new West Wing, and how this show just keeps getting bigger, is one reason. Sitting in our VIP suite at the Third Eye Blind concert at the KFC Yum! Center was another. Seeing all the people milling about the show taking in the latest and greatest the industry has to offer is another.

But none of those moments were my most memorable part of the Equip Expo. I served as the moderator of two

of our 14 educational panels (hat's off again, this time to LM Editor Christina Herrick, who pinch-hit for me on my Friday morning panel). The best part of the panels is when I open the floor to the Q&A. I felt a little like Phil Donahue jogging around the room of 100-plus, trying to spot the next raised hand.

I saw one person eagerly raise his hand every time I opened it back up to questions. I gave him a nod and knew I wanted to end with his question, whatever it was. I finally got to the back of the room and handed the microphone to this 14-year-old attendee. He told the panel he was moving beyond a one-man operation and adding some of his classmates to his crew for the upcoming summer. About how long should he expect until his crew is fully trained?

Panelist Taylor Milliken, owner of Milosi in Nashville, acknowledged the question but then congratulated the young landscaper for having the guts to speak up in a packed room. The room erupted in applause. I slapped the kid on his back and closed the panel down.

Traditionally, I wrap up my Equip Expo experience with a walk across the Big Four Bridge into Jeffersonville, Ind., and visit Parlour for a slice of pizza and a cold beer. But this year, I was immediately off to the airport for a second trip: a flight to Florence, Italy, to join the Aces Wild peer group, an event co-hosted by McFarlin Stanford and The Grow Group.

But that is a story for the next issue ... until then, *arrivederci!* 🇮🇹



At the end of the panel, I told the room I wanted their photo in the new issue.

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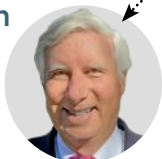


MORE ONLINE

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

What's the No. 1 thing a green industry business owner should do during the off-season?

"Evaluate the previous season and based on that data, plan for the coming year."



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New Orleans, La.

"The No. 1 activity would be creating a budget that provides a road map for success.

It should flow to your pricing, weekly/monthly KPI tracking and any planned new investments. Our numbers tell a story, as leaders our job is to bring this story to life for our team."

"Recharge and reload. Business planning is tied directly to yearly results."



"Nothing happens till someone sells something. Work is everywhere, but you have to look for it and be an order maker, not an order taker. Waiting for the phone to ring is a great way to get passed by those who don't wait."

"Review and update their strategic plan."



"We tend to tackle a lot of 'special projects,' whether cleaning up the handbook, doing extra training, revamping our SOPs or doing some long-range planning. With a slightly slower pace, we can zoom out from the day-to-day business and work 'on the business' more than just 'in the business.'"

"How is your job mapping? Is your routing as efficient as it can be? How timely is your KPI tracking? If your management team isn't as busy in winter as in spring, you are missing an opportunity to get better."



OUR MISSION: *Landscape Management* shares a comprehensive mix of content designed to stimulate growth and take our readers to their next level.

ServiceTitan unveils its priority: AI

ServiceTitan's Pantheon event featured a star-studded lineup of keynote speakers, informational sessions and a focus on artificial intelligence

BY SYDNEY FISCHER | DIGITAL MEDIA SPECIALIST

What do tennis champion Venus Williams, Grammy-nominated pop-rock group OneRepublic and *New York Times* best-selling author Dan Heath have in common? They all made an appearance at ServiceTitan's 2023 Pantheon event in Orlando, Fla.

ServiceTitan, a software company that acquired Aspire Software and FieldRoutes, hosted more than 2,000 industry professionals at the World Center Marriott in September. The event was packed with more than 20 product training sessions and featured over 50 industry and thought leaders.

Ara Mahdessian, co-founder and CEO of ServiceTitan, welcomed attendees before the breakout sessions began. The day included sessions led by industry leaders and ServiceTitan representatives who shared information about the company's latest focus: artificial intelligence (AI).

ServiceTitan's platform offers a handful of useful tools for contractors, ranging from project tracking to price book management, but the stars of the show were the newly announced features using the company's own AI solution, Titan Intelligence (TI).

"We're sitting on a gold mine in terms of everything we can do with AI," Margie Baker, senior customer success manager for ServiceTitan, told a room full of attendees during her breakout session.

The company announced four new AI-powered products at the event, including Ads Optimizer, Dispatch Pro, Integrated Financing and Second Chance Leads.

FUTURE LOOKS GOOD

Vahe Kuzoyan, co-founder and president of ServiceTitan, kicked off his session with the story of the company's founding and followed up with where he sees the company's future heading.

"This started when my father, who was a plumber, and my grandfather, who worked with HVAC, tasked us with finding them a software to manage their business," Kuzoyan said. "As far as I'm concerned, the construction part of ServiceTitan is existential for the company. This is the future growth-driver for the company. It's our main priority."

Although a lot of the sessions focused on construction teams and how they specifically can use the software, Anmol Bhasin, chief technology officer for ServiceTitan, said many industries can use the tools they provide.

"Since its founding, the company has always been hyper focused on the trades," Bhasin said. "We'll continue to innovate and grow into other markets."

ALL THE RIGHT MOVES

Not only did attendees hear from company representatives, but they also got the chance to chat with their peers.

Jason Brady, owner and CEO of Above & Beyond Service Co., said ServiceTitan's services helped his company achieve record profits.

"It's using all this technology to figure out how I can win today and how



Sydney Fischer (second from left) digital media specialist, with Angie Snow, principal industry advisor at ServiceTitan, Jason Brady, owner and CEO of Above & Beyond Service Co. and Jesse Sticka, IT director at Lovett at ServiceTitan's event.

my people can win today," Brady said. "That's the most important part. If they win—the customer wins—everybody is going to win."

Brady said business owners must learn to adapt the changes in the industry before they fall behind. It's never too late to learn something new, but he recommends those considering integrating ServiceTitan into their business to act soon before they have to play catch-up.

COUNTING STARS

A keynote speech featured Dan Heath, coauthor of *Made to Stick: Why Some Ideas Survive and Others Die* and ended at the House of Blues with food, drinks and lots of conversation, accompanied by a concert from pop band OneRepublic.

The event closed out the next day with a fireside chat between Mahdessian and tennis pro Venus Williams. 📸

LM GALLERY

Check out a few of the faces the LM team saw at the Equip Expo 2023

1 Leading the leadership panel

Denise Mulliken, Hunter Industries (left) and Jackie Gachina, Gachina Landscape Management (right) were a part of a great panel discussion on leadership at Equip Expo, moderated by Editor Christina Herrick.

2 Three cheers for 40 years

Bill Roddy, publisher, Herrick and Craig MacGregor, associate publisher during Equip Exposition's opening event.

3 Not his first Crash

MacGregor shows once again why he's the Crashers No. 1 fan — by getting another selfie with the lead singer during the opening night festivities.

4 Pre-panel huddle Before entering a packed conference room for the Your Company, Your Culture panel, (left to right) LM Editor-in-Chief Seth Jones, Brian Brueggemann of Wilson360, Larry Ryan of Ryan Lawn & Tree and Taylor Millikin of Milosi, hatch out a game plan.

5 Stihl going strong Roger Phelps of Stihl and Emily Lindley and LM columnist Marty Grunder of The Grow Group spotted at a packed Stihl booth.

6 5 kilometers of fun Herrick and Roddy were up and at 'em early for the event's 5K Fun Run. The pair caught up with LM columnist Jeff Korhan during the run for some fun conversation and views while running the bridge over the Ohio River.

7 Office hours Tabettha Varwig (left) and Phil Harwood (center) of Tamarisk Business Advisors were joined by Scott Kay, Dave Klier, Rick VanHevel and Tory Odom from The Professional Group of Roseville, Mich., during their "office hours" at LM's booth during the show.





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Equip expands, sets new records

Record attendance and the addition of a new wing of exhibitors highlight the 2023 Equip Exposition

BY SETH JONES AND CHRISTINA HERRICK





LOUISVILLE, KY. — In year two of Equip Exposition, previously known as GIE+Expo, the show once again broke its own attendance and exhibit space sales records. More than 27,000 people attended the mid-October show, which offered attendees over a million square feet of exhibit space, 30 acres of outdoor exhibit area and numerous educational sessions, including 14 seminars hosted by *Landscape Management* magazine, the official media partner of Equip Expo.

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Continued from page 13

Landscape contractor registrations increased by 20 percent over last year and dealer attendance was up by 5 percent.

“The 2023 show was our largest to date,” said Kris Kiser, president and CEO of the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute, which owns Equip Exposition. “It shows you how much companies and manufacturers want to be part of Equip Exposition and showcase their products to landscapers, dealers and the entire industry. It is the place to be every October if you’re in the business.”

LM’s educational seminar attendance increased by 23 percent over last year, the inaugural year of the partnership. Two of the magazine’s 14 classes sold out, with another class at 96 percent capacity.

“I’m thrilled by the results of our educational sessions at Equip Expo,” says Bill Roddy,



NOT-MISS MOMENTS
Whether it was Jeffrey Scott’s book signing at LM’s booth or education sessions, there was a lot to see and do at the 2023 Equip Exposition.

PHOTO: LM STAFF (TOP); GACHINA LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT (BOTTOM)



Scan code for program details and registration.

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publisher of *LM*. “It’s a testament to the quality and dedication of our speakers. The exceptional attendance and overwhelmingly positive feedback confirm the commitment to continuous learning in our industry.”

One noticeable difference between this year’s show and last year’s show was the expansion of the Expo into the West Wing of the Kentucky Exposition Center. Unoccupied in previous years, the West Wing included over 100 additional exhibitors, a new product showcase, an

area for drone operation classes and simulator golf screens with golf professionals offering free 10-minute lessons.

Another big change for the 2023 Equip Education was a free concert at the KFC Yum! Center, the downtown arena that serves as the home of the University of Louisville’s basketball programs. Country singer Dylan Scott opened the show, while Third Eye Blind served as the headliner.

Continued on page 17

GREAT VIEW, GREAT COMPANY
A few of our closest friends joined the *LM* team in our suite at the KFC Yum! Center to get a great view of Dylan Scott and Third Eye Blind.

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New product introductions

New product introductions are a major part of Equip Exposition. This year is no different, with many equipment manufacturers adding new battery-powered, electric or autonomous equipment. Here's a few that caught our editors' eyes (for more on these products, be sure to visit **LandscapeManagement.net**):

Mean Green Mowers added a new 96-inch, all-electric EVO mower with automatic and articulating fold-out wings. It comes with a 43 kW hour battery and 10,000 hours of runtime for the life cycle of the battery.

Yakta unveiled two split-frame mowers, the YXR 710 and YXR 910, that can change deck sizes and function in one package. It allows the power base to accept different front half attachments including a snow blower, mower decks and more.

Bobcat introduced the company's ZT6000E, its first electric zero-turn mower. It features a 58-volt-20 kW battery with an estimated runtime of 4 to 6 hours.

Exmark added an electric version of its Lazer Z zero-turn riding mower. The HyperCell power system powers the Lazer Z V-Series and can deliver up to 7-plus hours of runtime per charge. The Adapt-equipped 60-inch Electric Series 4 cutting deck uses three high-torque commercial electric blade motors.

Case Construction Equipment unveiled several new mini track loaders and articulating and telescoping loaders, including the all-electric SL22EV articulating loader which can charge in one hour.

Honda debuted its autonomous work mower, the company's first prototype electric zero-turn riding mower. Honda said it combines cutting performance and high location accuracy with obstacle detection.

Stihl also introduced its new RZA 700 series battery zero-turn mowers. The Stihl RZA 748 (48-inch deck width), Stihl RZA 752 (52-inch deck width) and Stihl RZA 760 (60-inch deck width) boast a cutting height range of 1 to 5 inches. The units feature a built-in 24 kWh battery, can reach a speed of 16 mph, a run time of up to eight hours and a fast charge time of approximately four hours.




DEMO TIME
A major draw for contractors is the chance to try out equipment in Equip Expo's 30 acres of outdoor demo space.

Continued from page 15

Equip announced that the free concert will return in 2024, with the bands announced at a later date. Also new for 2024 will be a welcome reception held at Churchill Downs, the home of the Kentucky Derby.

"Building on the success of this year's show, we continue to incorporate new experiences for 2024," Kiser said. "Every year, Equip Exposition invests and commits to making the user experience unique in response to the industry's needs, demands and

market changes. So, while it will be the same show you've always loved — it will just get better."

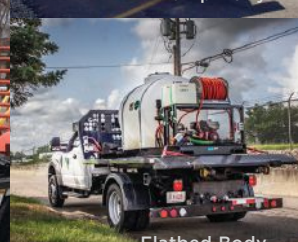
Early bird registration for the 2024 show is now open, for \$25 per attendee. To register, visit **EquipExposition.com**. 

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MAS VERDE – WITH LESS WATER – POR FAVOR

Three companies, including Maas Verde in Central Texas, discuss how they overcame irrigation nightmares

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

2023
IRRIGATION
SHOW
ISSUE



Maas Verde Landscape Restoration worked to fix a nonfunctioning irrigation system at a popular Texas state park.

As municipalities across the country react to water restrictions, irrigation professionals step up to help their clients reduce water use and, in turn, save money.

Late this month, the Irrigation Association welcomes its members to San Antonio, Texas, for the annual Irrigation Show and Education Week, to share what is new and improved for the industry. With more than 225 exhibitors at the Henry B. Gonzalez Convention Center, the best of the irrigation industry will be on display in the Alamo City.

To celebrate the good work of the irrigation industry, *Landscape Management* visited with two irrigation companies in Texas and one in California: Maas Verde Landscape Restoration in Austin, Texas, Southern Botanical in Dallas and Harvest Landscape Enterprises in Anaheim, Calif. These companies share how they helped their clients revamp an existing irrigation system and got *mas verde* — with less water — *por favor* (more green — with less water — please).

COMPANY: MAAS VERDE

PROJECT: BALMORHEA STATE PARK

LOCATION: TOYAHVALE, TEXAS

Balmorhea State Park is a 46-acre property with a large spring-fed swimming pool in Toyahvale, Texas. About 15 million gallons of water flow through the pool from the San Solomon Springs to about 90 irrigation canals. Texas Parks & Wildlife Department estimates more than 200,000 people will visit the park this year.

"This is the most reliable water source in west Texas in that arid portion of the state," says Ted Maas, owner and operator of Maas Verde Landscape Restoration.

The Civilian Conservation Corps built Balmorhea State Park in the 1930s. A nonprofit that donated trees near the pool approached Maas Verde to fix a faulty irrigation system for the trees. Maas says park maintenance hand-watered the trees when a previous irrigation contractor left mid-project, but that approach was not sustainable. The other challenge: the nonprofit wanted the installation completed within a week as part of an event.

"(The previous contractor) tried to hook up a 1/2-inch line to an existing zone that already didn't work," he says. "They were just hooking up this 1/2-inch line to an existing lateral line on a zone. The guy just ran 40 feet of pipe and then stopped and then disappeared and was never heard from again."



Diagnosing the cause of a broken irrigation system for 2,600 square-foot turf area near Balmorhea State Park's famous spring-fed swimming pool proved to be a major challenge.

Maas Verde installed bubblers for the young trees, but Maas says he noticed the bubblers were in the same zone as rotors.

"We've got rotor heads that are watering grass that have different watering requirements than bubblers for trees," he says. "Trees have different watering requirements, and we don't want to overwater or underwater either one of those."

Maas says a change order approved the installation of a separate valve and zone for the tree bubblers. Crews worked in 107-degree F heat to complete the project on time.

PHASE 2

Then, the park approached Maas Verde with a new challenge: to fix a broken irrigation system for a 2,600-square-foot turf area near the pool. Maas says the park superintendent estimated the irrigation system hadn't worked for at least a year or two.

"It was a pretty massive area and no real direction (for the system design)," he says. "There were a couple of documents that just seemed like they weren't proving to be true, which was throwing me through a loop."

Continued on page 20

PROJECT BY THE NUMBERS:

- ◆ Target treatment area of eroded lawn surface: 2,600 square feet
- ◆ Total area of project: 13.1 acres
- ◆ PVC installed/replaced: 215 linear feet plus joints and fittings (including numerous 3-inch, 4-inch pipe repairs and 3-inch valve install)
- ◆ Underground faults traced and resolved: 25 (including 3-inch and 4-inch faults with T joints)

Continued from page 19

Maas Verde replaced damaged irrigation heads with irrigation heads with swing joints.

"If you have a swing joint on it, it's a more flexible piece of pipe, that if a mower hits it, allows the unit to flex versus just breaking upon impact," Maas says.

Maas says crews struggled to troubleshoot the source of the faulty system. He says as he worked to trace wires, he found another signal a couple of feet away.

"I find a box that's been buried 8 inches, and there's another valve there, an old valve, and it was one that was missed by the former contractors that had replaced all the valves a couple of years back or updated all the valves. I was about to just cap the



A public improvement district north of Fort Worth contacted Southern Botanical to help fix an ailing irrigation system that used three times more water in 2022 than it had in the previous years.

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thing and just torch it and then I realized, that's the valve or zone that's not working hydraulically."

Maas says crews fixed the wiring and repaired some breaks in the line. Getting the irrigation system functioning again for the turf near the pool is a major success, he says.

"That was a huge focal point for the park and for user experience," he says. "To have that area now? ... The irrigation works. It's green. It doesn't look like a compacted desert moonscape on that side of the park."

COMPANY: SOUTHERN BOTANICAL

PROJECT: PID-6

LOCATION: FORTH WORTH, TEXAS

Southern Botanical, No. 72 on the 2023 LM150 list, started working on PID-6, a public improvement district north of Fort Worth a little more than a year ago. Cities and municipalities in Texas can create



PROJECT BY THE NUMBERS:

Upgrades to PID-6's irrigation system include:

- ◆ 34 valve replacements
- ◆ 20 controller upgrades to Smartlink
- ◆ 16 main line repairs
- ◆ 15 lateral line repairs
- ◆ 32 rotor replacements
- ◆ 36 head replacements
- ◆ 2 DCVA (backflow preventer) replacements
- ◆ 2 Baseline controller board replacements
- ◆ 3 Baseline substation controller panel replacements
- ◆ 3 Baseline master valve bi-coder replacements
- ◆ 3 Baseline controller antenna replacements

PIDs with assessments placed on the property owners to fund community enhancements.

Properties in PID-6 include multiple homeowner associations, parks, common spaces and trails. PID-6 encompasses 6 million square feet, with about 140 acres of turf.

"It's a very large property with four main intersections or four main streets that surround the PID, and then within that you have the interior parks that we have to take care of," says Nate Battenfield, project manager with Southern Botanical.

PID-6 approached Southern Botanical to fix its ailing irrigation system which PID-6 General Manager Lillian Collins said used three times as much water in 2022 as in previous years. Southern Botanical now manages maintenance for the PID.

"They were spending a lot of money every month in irrigation," says Brian Schendzielos, commercial branch manager with Southern Botanical. "A lot of that was from not reporting what was happening, so they didn't have clear reports to see what was broken. They didn't have monthly inspections done."

Continued on page 22



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Continued from page 21

DIALING IN

Schendzielos says the team at Southern Botanical knew having better access to real-time data would get PID-6 off on the right foot. The team at Southern Botanical approached the irrigation upgrades in sections, including irrigation system repairs such as standardizing the irrigation controllers, installing pressure-regulating heads and creating 725 hydrozones. The company added Hydro-Point Baseline controllers and Weathermatic's Smart-Link to provide Southern Botanical with solid data.

"Just for immediate impact and for budgetary considerations, those were the lowest hanging fruit that we could adjust to be able to save them a significant amount of money on their water bills," he says.

Schendzielos says the switch to SmartLink controllers where possible allows Southern Botanical to turn the system on or off without sending an irrigation tech to the site each time. And over the course of a few months, the team maximized the system's efficiencies.

"We've got two controller models that could really give us some pretty good data with what's happening," he says.

Battenfield says communication with Collins is a major part of his role.

"I probably talk to Lillian more than I talked to anybody else in my family," he jokes. "It's that communication back and forth, letting her know 'This is where we're at today. This is where we're working.' It's a lot of involvement in moving pieces. We keep her up to date."

Battenfield says he also drives with Collins weekly to look over the property and talk about anything needed from a management or irrigation standpoint.

So far, the team at Southern Botanical says these upgrades helped PID-6 save about \$79,000 in the year since the upgrades.

COMPANY: HARVEST LANDSCAPE ENTERPRISES

PROJECT: ORANGE HOME OWNERS ASSOCIATION

LOCATION: ORANGE, CALIF.

Thanks to an irrigation overhaul at a HOA that uses reclaimed water, Harvest Landscape Enterprises helped cut the HOA's water bills by 40 percent, according to Max Moreno, vice president of water conservation for Harvest Landscape Enterprises, No. 78 on the 2023 LM150 list.

"The community is on reclaimed water, and they have a lot of turf everywhere, and they were looking for a way to reduce the water bill even more without having to sacrifice the turf," he says.

Moreno says he approached this project in several ways. First, Harvest Landscape Enterprises added Weathermatic smart controllers. Next, they added points of connection (POCs) that have a matching valve flow sensor. Finally, they completed an entire irrigation system overhaul including dedicated lines for turf and planters and the installation of drip irrigation.

The system, installed in the 1980s, watered both the turf and planters and caused a significant amount of water waste, according to Moreno.

"Just to keep that aesthetics of the grass alive, (they would) overwater all these planters to the point where it's

Continued on page 24



Harvest Landscape Enterprises gave this irrigation a complete overhaul to slash water use.

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Continued from page 22

causing a little bit of water damage against the building just because of the saturation on the planters,” he says.

He overhauled the entire irrigation system to separate out the irrigation lines for turf and planters. Harvest Landscape Enterprises added Weathermatic smart controllers and Hunter Pro-Spray sprinkler heads regulated to 45 PSI and Hunter MP Rotators.

From an integrated pest management standpoint, the targeted irrigation helped improve plant health in the planters, Moreno says.

“Some of those planters that have been overwatered for so many years are producing healthier roots now. Overwatering causes a lot of disease to plants and uses a lot of manpower because overwatering also creates more weeds,” he says. “Sometimes it encourages more growth than we want.”

Moreno says as a result, Harvest Landscape Enterprises uses less chemical applications to maintain the planters.

The project cost was a challenge, Moreno says, acknowledging he worked with the client to establish a realistic budget to accomplish the overhaul. Moreno adds the work on the project took place during the pandemic, which hurt the supply chain and made finishing

on time a challenge — one Harvest met head-on. Crews wrapped up the project a week ahead of schedule.

“The clients were really happy, but not only that, the property management company saw this as a success,” he says.



Max Moreno

He says the property manager wants to use this project as an example to other communities to show the potential these projects have on water use.

“We don’t know the savings, we don’t know the potential of a lot of these communities until they take a stab at it with professionals that know what to do,” Moreno says the property management company told him.

Moreno says he’s proud of how the project turned out, noting the landscaping and turf look great thanks to a more targeted approach. Moreno says pre-installation, the HOA used roughly 8,127,768 gallons of water. After the first year, the HOA’s water use was 6,698,340 gallons. By the third year, Moreno says the HOA’s overall water usage is 5,612,244 gallons of water.

“It really ended up being a successful conversion ROI quicker than expected. I had predicted four to five years, and within the second year, we were already breaking even,” he says. 📈

PROJECT BY THE NUMBERS:

- ◆ Pre-installation water use: 8,127,768 gallons
- ◆ Three years post-installation water use: 5,612,244 gallons
- ◆ Percent reduction in water bill: 40
- ◆ Retrofitted new pipe: 10,000 feet
- ◆ Hunter MP Rotators: 1,600
- ◆ Drip irrigation: 58,000 feet



Creating separate lines for turf and for planters and adding Hunter MP Rotators at 45 PSI helped this HOA reduce its water use by 40 percent.

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Headed to San Antonio for the Irrigation Show? Here's what you need to know

First timers might get overwhelmed by the scope and offerings of the association's annual event. Here, the Irrigation Association's Stephanie Clark shares what not to miss.

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR



The Irrigation Association's (IA) Show and Education Week heads to the Lone Star state from Nov. 27 to Dec. 1 at the Henry B. González Convention Center.

For those attending their first Irrigation Show, Stephanie Clark, strategic partnerships and business development vice president with the Irrigation Association, shares what not to miss.

Clark says newcomers should make plans to attend IA's First-Timers Roundtable on Nov. 28 at 3:30 p.m. Clark says the roundtable offers those new to the show an inside scoop from show veterans. First-timers will also learn how to navigate the show to make the most of their time in San Antonio.

"We're going to do a quick walk-through of the exhibit floor to provide first-timers with some ideas on how to best utilize their time," she says.

Networking events are also not to be missed, Clark says. Also on Nov. 28 is IA's River Walk Fiesta welcome event at San Antonio's River Walk at 5 p.m. The Craft Brewfest returns to the exhibit

floor on Nov. 29 at 2 p.m. There's also a Women in Irrigation Breakfast on Nov. 29 at 7:30 a.m., and a Young Professionals Social on the same day at 5 p.m.

PLAN AHEAD

Clark says another important step for Irrigation Show newcomers is using the tools IA provides to help organize their time in San Antonio. This includes downloading the Irrigation Show app and utilizing the show's website at IrrigationShow.org.

"You can create a profile and set up a My Show Planner," she says of the mobile app. "You can search for exhibitors by category and product. And then you can favorite those exhibitors and add them to your show planner. So, when you arrive on-site and pull up your planner, you can easily locate those companies on the exhibit floor."

Clark says the app syncs with the show's website and attendees can learn more about the product galleries and details about everything going on at the event, including all of the education sessions.

"Planning your day-to-day schedule before the show enables you to better utilize your time onsite," Clark says.

IA will offer its members an opportunity for free headshots in the association's member lounge with professional lighting, background and a photographer. Headshots are great for

LinkedIn or being an industry source for a media publication like *Landscape Management*. Attendees can use the app to schedule a headshot session around their classes and trade show floor time.

NEW PRODUCTS, NEW EVENTS

Another not-to-miss area is the show's New Product Contest. There will be 46 new products in three categories — agriculture irrigation, landscape lighting and landscape irrigation, Clark says.

New this year will be a 360-degree IA pavilion. This is a central hub on the exhibit floor designed to connect attendees to IA resources, Clark says. There's also a resume wall.

Another reason for Irrigation Show newbies to download the mobile app is the association's new attendee scavenger hunt. Clark explains the game won't officially kick off until the exhibit floor opens. Attendees will need to visit eight exhibitor booths, the IA Pavilion and the General Session to qualify to win some great prizes.

"We're giving away a 15-inch MacBook Air with M2 chip and an Apple Watch Ultra GPS-Cellular," she says.

Another new event Clark says, is the Pack for Impact event to support Child Safe San Antonio. Irrigation Show attendees can join IA staff to stuff backpacks with school supplies for children supported through this local nonprofit organization.

"Pack for Impact is open to all Irrigation Show attendees and begins after the General Session. We will stuff backpacks in the main lobby from 10 a.m. to 12 p.m.," she says. "We think it's important to support the local San Antonio community and children impacted by abuse." 📷



Event organizers offer plenty of opportunities to network at the 2023 Irrigation Show and Education Week in San Antonio.

PHOTO: IRRIGATION ASSOCIATION



Get smart with the help of some drought-busting tools

Advanced irrigation technology allows contractors to assist clients with more effective irrigation practices while minding local mandates to curb water use

BY MIKE ZAWACKI | CONTRIBUTOR

Widespread periods of no rain and water restrictions are no longer limited to the Sun Belt. Many communities face drought conditions and are regulating water use to preserve local aquifers. Therefore, it's critical landscape and irrigation contractors assist clients in adhering to these mandates, which may differ from market to market.

A revolution in smart controller technology allows irrigation contractors to quickly adjust an irrigation system's watering window in real time, says Ben Coffey, product specialist and training manager at HydroPoint, which markets the WeatherTRAK weather-based smart irrigation controllers.

"There are days of the week that we need to manage, and there are times of the day that we need to manage," he says. "All of the (smart irrigation) technology out there allow(s) a greater level of water management and allows (contractors) to adhere to local (water-use) ordinances."

ORDINANCE OVERSIGHT

Through data collection and reporting, contractors can provide clients with more effective watering practices and oversight so they abide by local ordinances and avoid potential fines or penalties.

"It's all about using data and having the (irrigation) system running properly," Coffey says. "The best water managers manage a (water) budget or allocate

the gallons they can use effectively. This is the future of water restrictions."

Smart controller technology allows an irrigation system to cull local weather data from the Internet to adjust a client's irrigation schedule, says Mara McCartney, a senior product manager with Hunter Industries, which has the Hydrowise Wi-Fi irrigation control system. A smart controller system, compared to a traditional system that relies on manual adjustments, can save upwards of 50 percent in the number of gallons used, she notes.

"When an irrigation contractor or a homeowner is setting up their irrigation schedule to water, they pick the days of the week and the run times per station or per zone that they're interested in," she says.

On cooler days, the system can adjust runtime to 7 minutes instead of its scheduled 10, McCartney says, noting, "that's when you start to see water savings."

ADJUSTMENTS

Hunter's smart system has predictive watering capabilities, which automati-

cally adjust based on recent periods of precipitation, the current forecast and preprogrammed triggers dictating when to water, McCartney adds.


However, mandated water restrictions may not be as impactful as municipalities realize, often resulting in more intense and wasteful irrigation practices during allocated watering times.

Brad Wardle, vice president of B-hyve Smart Home at Orbit (purchased by Husqvarna in 2021), says water conservation comes down to evapotranspiration (ET), or the processes by which water moves from the soil surface to the atmosphere and into the plant via evaporation and transpiration. Smart irrigation systems that consider ET can further conserve water, reducing a client's watering costs and increase sustainability.

KEEPING THINGS IN BALANCE

"It's about maintaining the moisture balance in the soil," Wardle says. "Most of the time, people water beyond what the soil can absorb and be used by the plant, resulting in runoff."

By entering soil profile, plant type, root zone depth, head type and application rate, along with microclimate data, into a smart irrigation system's watering algorithm, contractors can better mitigate excessive runoff, he says.

"Now, that's a drought buster," Wardle adds. "The goal is to save water, especially in drought areas. And that's what makes maintaining control so important. It'll keep plants alive and doing well — maybe not as green as you'd like — but in a recoverable state to bounce back." 

Zawacki is a Cleveland-based writer covering the landscape industry for nearly two decades.



DATA-BACKED
Smart controllers can help predict and adjust water needs of a system on the fly.

PRODUCTS THAT WORK



PT37

COMPANY: Ditch Witch

URL: [DitchWitch.com](https://www.ditchwitch.com)

The Ditch Witch PT37 ride-on plow/trencher features an adjustable side-facing seat that allows the operator to see all four tires and the plow box while operating. The PT37 is largely mechanical and features a simplified control display. The machine's compact footprint can scale down to 36 inches wide to fit through standard gates and access tight workspaces. A foldable rollover protection structure (ROPS) design allows users to keep the PT37 on a trailer for parking and storage in garages. An optional dual-wheel configuration adds traction and stability, while a Yanmar diesel engine provides 36.8 horsepower at 3,000 RPM.



PTX42

COMPANY: Vermeer

URL: [Vermeer.com](https://www.vermeer.com)

The Vermeer PTX42 walk-beside plow/trencher offers adjustable pivoting hand controls that contractors can adjust from one side of the machine to the other, providing increased flexibility when encountering obstacles or working in compact job sites. Equipped with a 46.8 horsepower Kubota WG1605 gasoline engine, the PTX42 can plow to a maximum depth of 24 inches and trench up to 42 inches deep and 6 inches wide. The machine also features electronic creep control, which helps optimize performance during longer-distance installations.



KWIK-TRENCH

COMPANY: Little Beaver

URL: [LittleBeaver.com](https://www.littlebeaver.com)

The Kwik-Trench mini-trencher offers a push-forward design for a contractor's shallow trenching needs. Its compact size allows access to areas inaccessible for full-size trenchers. At the job site, the Kwik-Trench achieves cutting speeds of up to 30 feet per minute. A manual crank on belt-driven models control the cutting depth (up to 12 inches on model KT 2400) while a locking swivel wheel helps to cut straight trenches.



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FERTILE GROUND

Why should you care about soil health?

There's a lot going on beneath the surface. Experts share what to consider.

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

Soil health is a critical part of growing healthy turf, shrubs and trees. Experts share what you should think about with soil health and how it affects your clients' plants and turf.

"Soil health is arguably the single most important factor we have any control over when it comes to pesticide-free plant health care," says Kevin Brewer, Northeast territory technical manager for Arborjet | Ecologel. "Good soil health can reduce plant health stressors outside of our control."

John Perry, founder of Greene County Fertilizer Co., says improving organic matter leads to less compaction, better nutrient uptake and more efficient water use.

"If people do want to have a lawn, then they're going to have to try to have the most efficient lawn possible," he says. "One that doesn't require a lot of water, which requires more organic matter in the soil. A better soil system is going to be vital going forward."

WHERE TO GET STARTED

The first step to improving soil health is to understand what kind of soil is on the property. Experts suggest utilizing state cooperative Extension resources to help you conduct a soil assessment.

After conducting soil tests, Jeremy Elliott learned many of his company's clients had soil with low organic matter and high pH. Elliott is owner of MyLawn! Turf & Tree in Great Bend, Kan. The company now uses a custom

blend fertilizer featuring biosolids as filler (instead of lime) and ammonium sulfate with water-insoluble nitrogen (instead of urea). This approach helps lower the pH in his clients' soil, he says.

"We're having more consistent green throughout the season," he says. "It's taken three or four years of us using (our custom blend) to where we're putting less fertilizers down, having just as good of results and later dormancy (with) earlier green up."

Perry says soil tests help LCOs understand what types of amendments to add instead of throwing blanket applications of fertilizer.

"You can grow good-looking turf in bad soil. We have enough fertilizer we can throw at it if people can just pound the ground over and over and over in order to maintain that," he says. "Or you can take a different approach and you can minimize all these fertilizer inputs that you're putting out and start addressing some of the soil issues."

SOIL HEALTH AND TREES

Soil health affects trees and shrubs in many ways, says Jay Herman, owner of Monster Tree Service of Rochester, N.Y. Trees that change color early, drop leaves early or have limbs falling off could indicate a soil pH issue or excess salinity.

"People are cleaning up the leaves, they're cleaning up the grass clippings, so trees are not getting all the nutrients from organic matter that the tree would if it was growing in the woods," he says.

Elliott says the main focus of his turf and ornamental rotation is to im-

prove soil health and mycorrhizae colonization surrounding tree root hairs. He says in the soil samples from his area, most soils have ample supply of potassium and phosphorous.

"Excessive phosphates in the soil ruins that relationship between mycorrhizae and fine root hairs," he says. "It doesn't kill the mycorrhizae, but it prevents them from binding to root hairs because there's too many phosphates in the soil."

Herman says it's hard to change the structure of the soil. So, a better course of action would be to select plants better suited for the soil.

"You need to consider matching the plants with the environment," he says. "Plants will thrive if they are in the right type of soil. Some plants do better in a soil that has a higher pH, while other plants will survive better in soil with a lower pH."

SIMPLE ADJUSTMENTS

Perry says following the soil test, LCOs can use the information gleaned from the test to come up with a plan to improve soil health.

"That can either be done through top dressing with compost or aerating and top dressing with other organic materials, adding humic substances to their fertilizer program," he says.

Perry says this isn't something that will happen overnight.

"Building healthy soil takes time," he says. 🌱

↑ AT THE ROOT
A focus on soil health and root health of trees can make a big difference as shown in this before (top) and after photo (bottom).



PROS' TOOLBOX

How franchises help members with transparency, support

Peter Henrikson shares why he chose GrassRoots for its focus on customers, products and technology BY LAUREN DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR

When Peter Henrikson considered joining a franchise, a large territory and a company that made customers a priority were at the top of his list. Those factors played a large role in his decision to become a franchisee for GrassRoots Turf in 2019.

"The company really differentiated itself in regard to how they viewed the customer," says Henrikson, owner of GrassRoots in Charlotte, N.C. "The customer is central to everything they do, and they build the franchise model around service."

Josh Wise, now CEO, founded GrassRoots Tree and Turf Care in 2002 in Acworth, Ga., after working in lawn care for several years. The company began franchising in 2019. GrassRoots franchisees provide tree and shrub care, lawn care and pest control.

THROUGH HIS CUSTOMERS' EYES

Henrikson's company provides lawn care, mosquito control and tree/shrub care to 95 percent residential and 5 percent commercial clients. While evaluating franchises, Henrikson wanted to learn how different companies treated customers. So, he looked at them from a customer's perspective — and encourages other potential franchisees to do the same.

"Go through the new customer process at a franchise and ask them questions like what happens if you need to cancel and who is the local

support team," he says. "You might have access to sales or the customer service team, but you most likely won't get the number for the owner."

Experiencing a franchise through the customer's eyes provided him with a better understanding of whether or not joining one would be a good fit, Henrikson says. With GrassRoots, he liked how customers had direct access to the entire team, including the franchise owner.

GrassRoots' customer-first approach also extends into its services, he says. He can customize services for each client, instead of taking a one-size-fits-all approach.

"That helps them feel like they have the best service company working for them," Henrikson says. "The ability to be nimble and tailor our program to the customer's needs and be more inclusive benefits the customer and also franchisees by providing higher retention rates and referrals."

NEW PRODUCTS, NEW TECHNOLOGY

One thing that surprised him about GrassRoots was the franchise's dedication to technology. In addition to the mobile technology used by the office staff, all technicians wear body cameras out in the field.

"If a customer calls and has a question about an application, my competitor can only give them their word," Henrikson says. "I can show them

exactly what we're talking about and what happened. The trust and credibility I can build goes through the roof, and that's what we're trying to do."

He says he also was impressed by the franchise's commitment to test new products, keeping GrassRoots competitive across the industry.

"We're not a stale company," Henrikson says. "Across the board, we will take well-managed risks to be a market leader — whether that's with technology or products. We can create change."




Peter Henrikson

OPEN COMMUNICATION

For those interested in learning more about GrassRoots, Henrikson said he and the other owners will gladly share their experiences.

"We'll share information with you like you're a part of the group," he says. "We want you to enter the organization knowing everything you need to be successful."

The franchisees also have open lines of communication with the corporate GrassRoots team, from customer service to the owner — as well as to each other. The franchisees have group forums and texts, along with meetings and events, to build collaboration and learn from other owners.

"You can be successful with GrassRoots without being an owner before or having experience in the green industry," he says. "That's how good the GrassRoots' support network is. That diverse background makes it that much better. We're invested in not only our success, but also that of our peers." 

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.

TIPSHEET

Use scheduling software to get a leg up on your business

With the right technology, you'll feel like you have a bigger staff than you do BY MIKE ZAWACKI | CONTRIBUTOR

Nearly every landscape or lawn care professional seeks ways to improve their services, reduce callbacks, improve client communications and manage their operation more efficiently.

Here are some ways scheduling software makes it possible to be more effective, more productive and more profitable.

ON THE GO

Most scheduling software runs on

mobile devices, which liberates employees from sitting behind desks, says Lourdes Valdez, director of product marketing at FieldRoutes.

"The software extends the technician's role, so now the technician is no longer just someone who shows up and does the work," she says. "Now the technician is not only the scheduler but also a support person. If there are questions, they can access account information about when they were out and for what service."

CUSTOMER SUPPORT

Business owners want busy calendars, and scheduling software offers greater assistance by ensuring crews operate as efficiently as possible. In addition, it provides a dedicated customer portal to review job scheduling, make payments, request work or even make referrals for new clients.

"It's something customers can access 24/7," says Anthony Milito, director of product marketing at Jobber. "First and foremost, the software helps create a job and assign it to crews. And in most cases, it can devise the most efficient route for crews to take to get there."

Milito says the software will automatically populate a job into a technician's schedule and notify the available team member.

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NARROW THE GAP

Automation helps contractors do more with less time and effort.

CALLBACKS AND CANCELLATIONS

Callbacks and last-minute cancellations are part of any field service business, but they don't have to be dead ends for lawn care companies.

There is value in learning why a client requires a follow-up visit or has refused their scheduled service. Over time, tracking this data identifies service trends for lawn care professionals and reveals troubleshooting solutions.

"For example, has there not been enough communication? Did (the client) not know about the appointment? Were there red flags? Or, in some cases, is it a customer who repeatedly cancels?" Valdez says. "You can follow up with them and learn why or often charge a fee for (recurring) cancellations."

GO WITH THE FLOW

Automated tasks within the software's functionality narrow the communications gap between the lawn care company and the client and build consumer confidence. It accomplishes this by sending automated text messages and emails to follow up on service calls, rebook appointments, request feedback or simply say, "Thank you for your business."


"These functions integrated with the software create a holistic customer experience and make things as efficient as possible," Milito says. "These are tools lawn care and turf care companies will want to investigate because they can be extremely helpful."

In addition to scheduling advanced appointments and payment reminders, automation can trigger sending emails or texts to follow prospecting calls or distribute surveys.

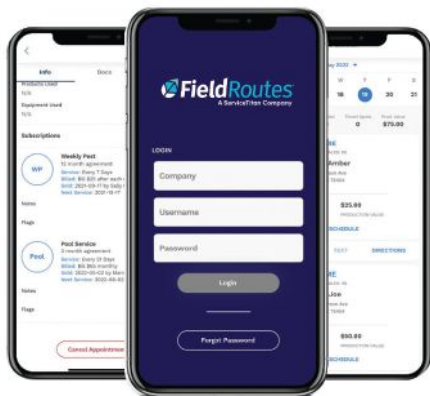
"That's the beauty of automation. It takes the manual work out," Valdez says. "So, for a smaller company where you don't have a lot of people to do this work, (automated tasks) save them time and allow those people to do things to grow the business."

HELPING HAND

Adopting or upgrading a field service software platform is no small task. Remember, the software provider wants its clients to succeed. Therefore, many offer lawn care professionals, regardless of size or scope, numerous resources – one-on-one coaching, training sessions, videos and written materials.

"If you're thinking about integrating this software into your business, then I would really encourage people to find the time to get connected to experts and support," Milito says. "An early investment here can pay off the long term." 

Zawacki is a Cleveland-based writer covering the landscape industry for nearly two decades.



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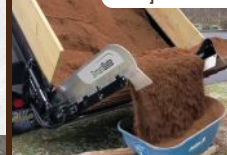


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THE BIG ONE

Restored to glory

BY ROB DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

LOCATION Del Monte, Calif.

COMPANY Gachina Landscape Management

DETAILS When Gachina Landscape Management took over this shopping center in 2014, the client had clear expectations. Gachina Senior Account Manager Leann Falsey says a hands-on approach to maintenance was No. 1 on their wish list.

“There was no mulch, the plant material and trees didn’t look very healthy,” she says. “We went in added mulch and treated the trees with fertilizer and injections to get them healthy again. We came in with a plan and helped get things like seasonal color rotations in order.”

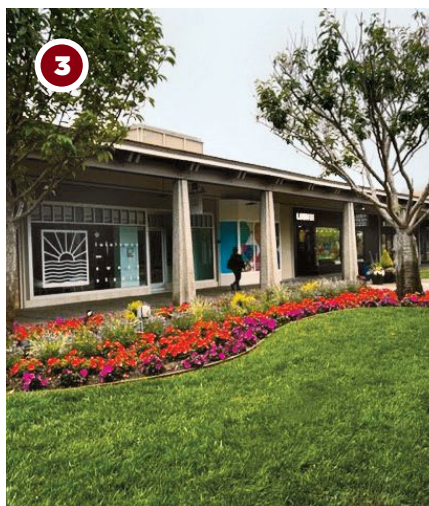
Gachina installed several drought-tolerant plants on the property, such as *Leucadendrons* and *Leucospermums*. A three-person crew on site five days a week provides maintenance, including plant health care — a major need.

As part of its process to revitalize the area, Gachina transitioned irrigation on the property from sprinklers to a drip system. The many planters on site also require their fair share of hand watering.

“We’ve had a lot of positive feedback from people who have noticed the changes since we’ve taken over,” Falsey says. “People have stopped our crews and told us how much the place has changed over the past few years.”

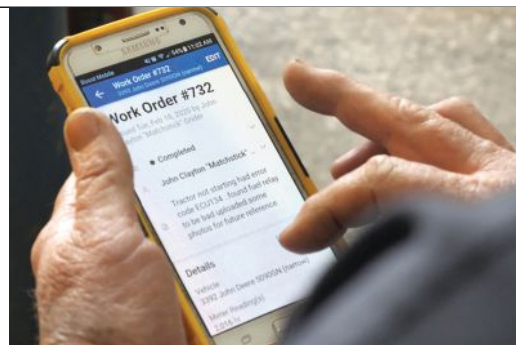
Gachina Landscape Management won a silver award from the 2022 National Association of Landscape Professionals’ Awards of Excellence Program for this project. 

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



Captions | 1. The transition to drip irrigation was a major project for Gachina crews. 2. According to Falsey, it took crews six months to become fully acquainted with the property. 3. Tree care is a priority for maintenance crews. Trees provide shade for flowers throughout the property. 4. Drought-tolerant plants, like the *Leucadendrons* seen here, were a must for this project located near the California coastline.

ON THE GO
Fleet management software can help companies keep track of job status, arrival times and scheduling.



BUSINESS BOOSTERS

Unlocking the strengths of fleet management software

Pro-grade fleet management software provides tangible benefits to the overall business, such as improved efficiency, reduced costs and enhanced safety **BY MIKE ZAWACKI | CONTRIBUTOR**

Fledgling landscape companies often deploy a patchwork of online software solutions to manage their daily operations. This is understandable, especially when operating on tight budgets and tighter margins.

However, as businesses grow, it's critical to integrate professional-grade software platforms, especially for fleet management, because the tangible benefits outweigh the costs.

UPGRADE TIME

Fleet management software provides numerous immediate advantages, including improved efficiency, reduced costs, increased safety, improved compliance, enhanced customer relations and proof of service, which is vital to mitigate costly slip-and-fall claims for northern firms offering snow and ice management.

Therefore, upgrading to a pro-focused fleet management platform as early as possible makes sense.

"If you're thinking about it and having this conversation with team members, then that's a clear sign you're ready," says Paul Romanowski, fleet manager at Drost Landscape in Petoskey, Mich. Drost's service portfolio is around 50 percent design/build, 25 percent enhancements (including landscape and snow removal), 20 percent tree care and 5 percent lawn care. "And if your margins are so thin that you question whether you can afford this, there are other issues to address. If your business is consistent, it's time to pull the trigger."

A misconception is that a landscaper must be a certain size or scope to warrant fleet management software. Any-sized operation benefits, says Matt Deloge, vice president at GPS Fleet Consulting, Portsmouth, N.H.

"If your company has had recent issues with driving infractions or were at fault in accidents, then you're a good candidate to benefit from fleet management software," Deloge says. "Or, if you're having trouble bridging the gap between the work done in the field and what's being invoiced through the office, then a fleet management program allows you to review and confirm the work done on a job site."

CORE FUNCTIONS

The range of features offered by fleet management software can make it overwhelming for contractors to choose the right platform. Here are some core functions contractors should prioritize.

1. Compliance. This compiles commercial vehicle inspection and issue documentation as regulated by a state's department of transportation.

"You need some way to take all that data and correlate it into something useful," Romanowski says. "Many programs do this, so you need to make sure there's the ability to integrate (vehicle) maintenance records and schedules."

2. Tracking. Oversee fuel usage and driver behavior, which identifies areas of waste, inefficiency and safety. Plus, integrated dashboard cameras provide an added layer of accountability and protection.

3. Dispatch, scheduling and progress. Report job status and arrival times to keep clients better informed.

4. Track specialized equipment. Track equipment other than trucks, such as powered (mowers and loaders) and non-powered equipment (snowplows).

5. Store-and-forward technology. If your vehicle travels into an area with little to no cellular coverage, when that vehicle comes back into range, the tech uploads the missed tracking data, "It's extremely important because once it reconnects to the cellular network, it backfills (the data) so the contractor doesn't miss a beat," Deloge says.


Lastly, another important consideration is a vendor's reputation for reliability, financial stability and customer support, especially when addressing system downtime issues.

IMPLEMENTATION

Software is another tool at a contractor's disposal. And any tool is only impactful when used correctly and utilized by the team. One prevailing problem is employee pushback due to a fleet management platform's Big Brother oversight and the perception that ownership is tracking everyone's actions.

"Companies must position this type of system in a way so that employees feel it's being used to protect them," Deloge says. "For example, (employees) don't want a he-said/she-said argument with clients about services or site time."

This is where a fleet management system alleviates that question entirely.

"Use it as a reward system and a protective measure for employees for doing the right things," he says. "It'll go a long way." 

Zawacki is a Cleveland-based writer covering the landscape industry for nearly two decades.

HOW TO

What are the best practices and equipment for effective stump removal?

Follow these tips to make the most of your stump removal services BY LAUREN DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR

Landscape professionals need to plan ahead for tree stump removals to ensure they have the right bid, tools and safety measures in place.

PROPER EQUIPMENT

Before starting on a stump removal project, operators should first ask customers what they plan to do with the site once the stump is gone, says Joseph Demkovich, director of franchise operations and safety at Monster Tree Service in Doylestown, Pa. That information helps determine how deep the grinding needs to be and the pricing for the removal.

“If the site is going to be turned into a lawn area or the stump is in a mulched landscape bed, then a shallow grind maybe just fine,” Demkovich says. “But if another tree is going to be planted in or around the same spot, a deeper grind with some root chasing may be needed.”

Monster Tree Service provides tree removal, tree pruning, stump grinding, tree cabling/bracing and plant health

care services for 90 percent residential and 10 percent commercial clients.

Demkovich says crews must also call 811 to locate and mark any utilities prior to the project. Once on site, they need to remove any loose dirt and rocks with a dirt rake or shovel. Teams also should use a well-maintained professional stump grinder with grinder teeth inspected for excessive wear, though starting a job with new teeth is best, Demkovich says.

Other important tools include a dirt rake, scoop or dirt shovel, wheelbarrow and a protective shield put around the stump to stop the debris from hitting someone. Contractors must also follow the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) Z133 safety standards and adhere to the stump grinder’s maintenance schedule.

Required personal protective equipment (PPE) for stump grinding includes industry-specific clothing, footwear, hard hat or helmet, safety glasses, face shield and hearing protection approved by ANSI, Demkovich says.

COME PREPARED

The stump’s size is a main determining factor for the type of approach needed prior to grinding, whether it’s a stump that needs digging up or one that requires a contractor to rent a stump grinder to remove, says Jeremy Lowe, director of agronomy at Chorbie in Frisco, Texas.

“We’d prefer to schedule that type of work together so we can have three to five stumps at one

time to grind and take the crew out to those over the day,” Lowe says. “It’s a lot more efficient and saves the customers money by taking that approach.”

Chorbie provides landscaping, lawn care, pools, design/build, tree and shrub care, pest control and general handiwork services to mainly residential properties. Many of the removals they do are for volunteer trees — unwanted tree seedlings, so they first inspect the site to determine if it’s safe and accessible.

A Chorbie arborist or qualified professional walks the site prior to starting to note trip hazards, unlevel ground or anything they need to know about the safety of the job. They take photos and videos to better orientate the team before starting the project.

“If it’s not safe, we won’t do it,” Lowe says. “Don’t be afraid to walk away from an unsafe job.”

MISTAKES TO AVOID

To prevent injury or damage, operators should steer clear of common pitfalls. Backfill holes with the stump grindings to prevent trip/fall hazards and to leave the area neat and clean, Demkovich says.

Wheeled grinders usually have removable dual wheels in the front for stability or uneven ground. Contractors may remove the wheels so the unit can go through gates, but must replace them before grinding, Demkovich says.

“If they are not replaced back on the machine, the risk of the machine tipping over is greatly increased — possibly causing serious injury to the operator,” Demkovich says. “Make sure the crew has the proper tools to remove and replace these wheels.”



STUMP SIZE
Experts say the size of the tree is a main determining factor for the type of approach needed for grinding.

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.

PHOTO: CHORBIE

> DID YOU KNOW

How to think ahead to protect your company

The legal team at Zilmen & McGuinness shares what issues contractors should know and think about **BY LAUREN DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR**

Previously an owner of a landscape company, Patrick McGuinness is now a founding attorney at Zilmen & McGuinness in the Minneapolis-Saint Paul, Minn., area. He works with business owners in the green industry on everything from drafting contracts to compliance issues. While laws and regulations vary by state, he shares legal concerns professionals in the green industry should know and understand that are universal across the country.

CRAFTING CONTRACTS

Most litigation issues McGuinness sees relate to work that has or hasn't been done and other contract disputes.

"You need contract language that protects your rights, like how you get paid, how much is due as a down payment, when payments become overdue, can you charge fees for credit card processing and how disputes will be handled," McGuinness says.

That's also true for subcontracted work. McGuinness advises contractors to include contract language that gives them permission to subcontract work.

"You also need a written agreement between you and the subcontractor," he says, noting it's important to specify that the subcontractor must have insurance. "It should show what portion of the project is the contractor versus the subcontractor, project timeline, specifications, compensation and a nonsolicitation clause so the subcontractor doesn't go after the contractor's customers or employees — and keeps the contractor's pricing and trade secrets confidential."

CUSTOMER RESPONSIBILITIES

In addition to calling public utilities to mark a property before digging, contractors should include in the job contract that the customer is responsible for marking privately run utilities. That includes invisible pet fences, irrigation and small gas lines installed for grills or fire pits.

Homeowners also need to get their property line marked or have a survey if a contractor will work near it.

"If you're doing a retaining wall or paver patio that's close to the property line, get language in the contract that states the property owner promises to cover costs if anything has to be moved because they're wrong with the property line," he says. "Even if it's just by an inch, it matters."

WORKER CLASSIFICATION

While a lot of businesses classify workers as independent contractors, they often don't meet the legal requirements of the qualification. A lawyer can go over a worker's employment status to help determine if they qualify.

"If the Department of Labor comes in and reviews, they get to make the determination if they should be an employee or independent contractor," McGuinness explains. "If they determine they should be an employee, you have to pay back overtime and back taxes. That adds up."

SUCCESSION PLANNING

Whether looking to sell or pass the business down in the future, owners can turn to a lawyer to create a legal timeline for that to happen. Factors to consider are family members or employees involved and how they might begin to take ownership, out-

standing debt, how that will be collected, and the owner's future livelihood once he or she moves on from the business.


No matter the size of a company, McGuinness says landscapers need to take a proactive approach to the legal aspects

“You need language that protects your rights, like how you get paid, how much is due as a down payment, when payments become overdue, can you charge fees and how disputes will be handled.”

—PATRICK MCGUINNESS



of their business. He encourages owners to interview lawyers with either green industry or construction law experience to find the right fit. If they already work with an attorney, they can request an annual business review to cover items that need to be renewed or addressed.

"There's always going to be something you need to fix or improve on, and it helps to have someone who can key you in on those things," he says. "It's important for the industry as a whole to continue staying on top of these things because it's important for the survival of their companies and safety of everyone." 

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.

HARDSCAPE SOLUTIONS

Rock solid

BY CHRISTINA HERRICK | LM EDITOR

LOCATION Pittsburgh, Pa.

COMPANY Local Roots Landscaping

DETAILS The client approached Local Roots Landscaping to overhaul their front yard from concept to completion. The homeowner wanted privacy from the neighbors and a grand entrance.

Kenneth Deemer, managing partner of Local Roots, says a three-dimensional design helped this client understand how the project would look once completed.

The property is in a historic neighborhood of Pittsburgh. Many of the homes are 100 years old or more. Staging proved to be a major challenge for this project due to its small footprint.

“Selecting the right equipment was very important because we had to lift some very heavy things,” he says, noting the project features 7-foot sandstone steps that weigh 900 to 1,200 pounds.

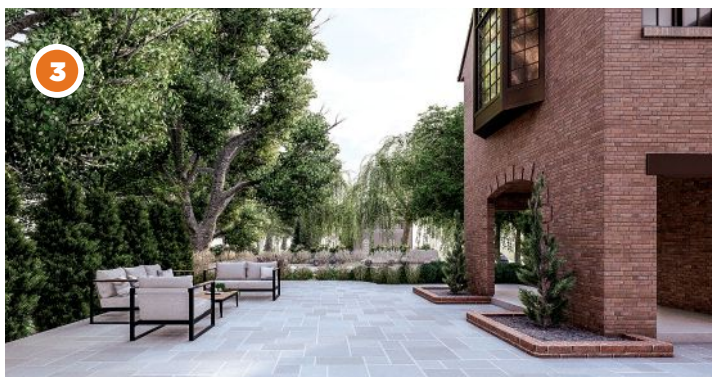
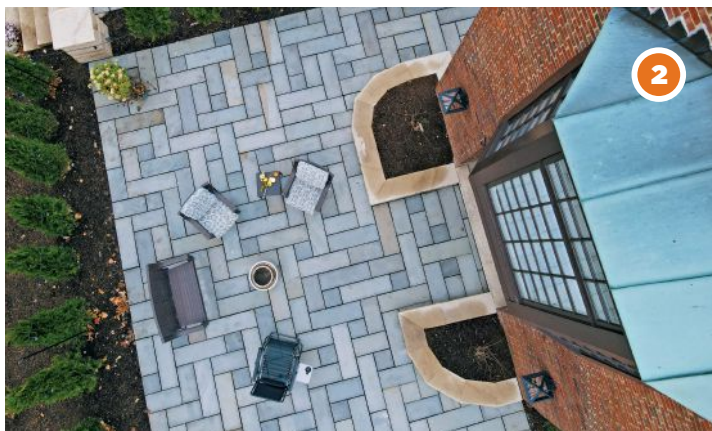
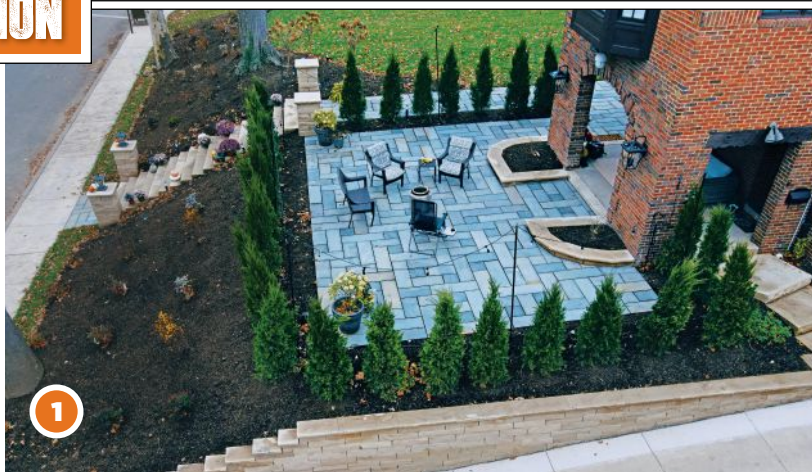
MQuip’s vacuum lifting equipment helped the Local Roots team place the heavy steps throughout the property as part of the grade change and transitions. Deemer also says utilizing Smart Level, a precision altimeter, helped the Local Roots team accurately capture the dimensions of the project.

“In order to estimate accurately and quickly and understand how many steps we are going to need to put in and how tall the walls are going to be, altimeters are great,” he says.

Other details include a sandstone retaining wall to achieve the desired grade, five sandstone pillars, 17 sandstone steps, a bluestone walkway and patio with landscape lighting, a planting section with drip irrigation and a sodded yard.

For this project, Local Roots Landscaping won a Bronze Award from the 2022 National Association of Landscape Professionals’ Awards of Excellence program. 🏆

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



Captions | 1. A sandstone retaining wall addresses the grade changes on the property. 2. An overhead view of the bluestone patio. 3. A bird's-eye view of the project. 4. A three-dimensional design helped the client conceptualize the final look of the project.



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- Curby Hughes, Owner, Curby's Landscape 

MAINTENANCE SHOP

Stay on top of compact excavator maintenance

Spending a little now can save a lot later, experts advise

BY BRIAN LOVE | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Compact excavators are strong and reliable tools that help landscape contractors work in small or tight access areas. Available on tracks or wheels, compact excavators come with a range of attachments.

To keep these machines running, experts say contractors must keep up with routine maintenance to make sure their excavators run smoothly and consistently.

DAILY MAINTENANCE

When it comes to things contractors overlook when operating compact excavators, one of the most common issues is failing to perform daily maintenance.

“Contractors get busy and they have a lot on their minds and they’re eager to get out on the job site and get to work,” says David Caldwell, national product manager at Takeuchi. “That can make it tempting to skip daily walkarounds and maintenance checks. However, when you skip them, you’re not as clued into your machine’s health and you’re likely not finding those small problems that could quickly become big ones.”

Another issue is the failure to keep cooling systems on machines clean and free of debris and dust. The excavator’s radiator needs daily cleaning to maintain proper airflow, along with boosting engine and hydraulic component longevity, Caldwell says.

Caldwell adds that contractors should inspect the excavator’s undercarriage every day. Material can build up over time and wear out the components, leading to roller and idler problems. This is especially true when operating on muddy or hazardous job sites, he says.

Contractors will need to keep a close eye on engine fluid levels and filter status. This includes engine oil, hydraulic fluid, coolant, driver motor lubricants and grease. Using the wrong lubricants and not following the operator’s manual can lead to expensive repairs, Caldwell says.

Finally, Caldwell says it’s important to use compatible attachments and that are in good condition. The attachments

must be suitable for the machine’s engines and hydraulics, while also not being excessively worn and free from dirt or debris. Using worn or improper attachments can damage the excavator itself, he says.

↑ KEEPING UP
Experts say it’s important to stay up-to-date on routine maintenance so contractors can maximize their equipment investment.

KEEPING THINGS IN CHECK

Downtime on job sites is costly, says Wesley Foy, product manager at Yanmar Compact Equipment North America. That’s why extending the life cycle of these tools is critical.

Foy says 99 percent of the procedures contractors should perform and how they should do them will be in the operator’s manual.


Despite a busy schedule, it is imperative to keep up with the service intervals of your compact equipment.

“If (contractors) miss a service interval, they should schedule or perform the missed service as soon as possible,” Caldwell says. “If contractors are concerned about potential damage that a missed service interval may have already caused, they should contact their dealers to explain what happened and set up any needed service or repairs.”

Foy says contractors should take the approach of “spend a little now, save a lot later.”

“It is better than spending none now and spending a lot later,” Foy says. “Maintenance is the most important thing to consider. Checking the breakers and fluid to keep the engine clean can be overlooked. And it can result in these machines breaking down, which causes unplanned downtime that contractors can’t afford.”

Caldwell says the best approach a contractor can take is to consider maintenance as a way to get the maximum out of the investment of that equipment.

“No excavator is maintenance-free, so if you’re not maintaining your machine, you’re asking for trouble,” he says. “Compact excavators must be correctly maintained to prolong their useful lives and enhance contractor productivity.” 



PRODUCTS THAT WORK

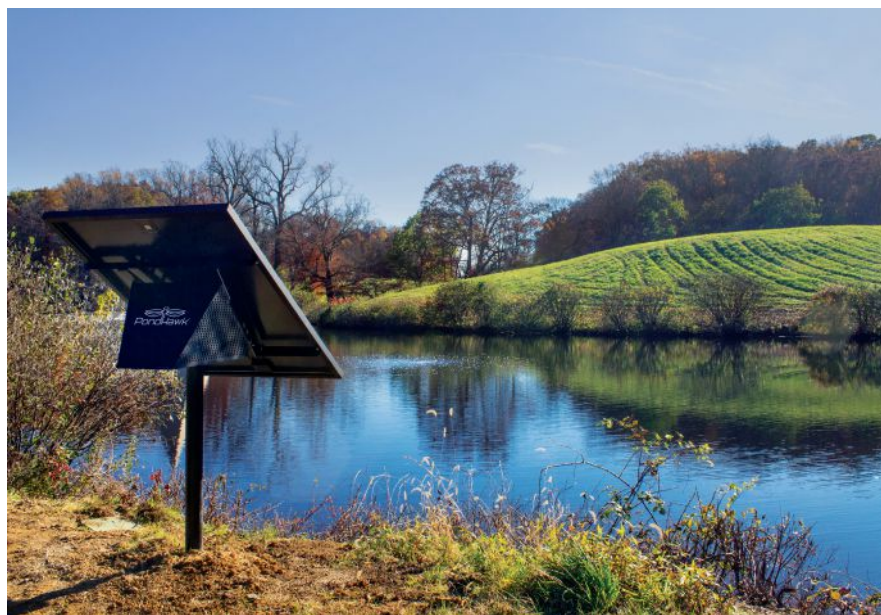
Pond Aerators

**PULSAR 3400****COMPANY:** WaterIQ**URL:** WaterIQTech.com

Designed for smaller applications with lower ranges and enclosed applications, the Pulsar 3400 from WaterIQ prevents and combats blooms and helps reduce labor and chemical costs. The Pulsar 3400 is safe for fish and plants and works to prevent algae growth with ultrasonic sound waves that disrupt gas vesicles, flagella and other cellular mechanisms in the algae, causing them to sink to the bottom and die, without releasing toxins.

**PONDHAWK****COMPANY:** LINNE Industries**URL:** PondHawk.com

PondHawk from LINNE Industries is a solar-powered subsurface aeration system that delivers low-maintenance pond maintenance. Using the power of the sun (even on cloudy days), PondHawk needs no electricity, so operating costs are minimal. PondHawk is quiet, tamper-resistant and environmentally friendly. Using subsurface aeration, PondHawk improves water quality, reduces odors and encourages the decomposition of organic matter with aerobic bacteria.

**PRS14 AERATION KIT****COMPANY:** The Pond & Rock Shop**URL:** PondRockShop.com

The Pond & Rock Shop Pond PRS14 Aeration Kit provides a 1/4 horsepower compressor that delivers aeration for ponds up to 1 acre. The standard PRS14 Aeration kit includes a compressor, a single self-weighted diffuser with an option for a double diffuser, 100 feet of weighted airline and fittings. The kit features a two-year warranty for the compressor and a five-year warranty on the diffuser and tubing. The PRS14 Kit helps create an oxygen-rich environment in the pond for fish and aquatic life.



FIVE QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Will Seiler

OWNER AND CEO

**SEILER'S LANDSCAPING
CINCINNATI, OHIO**

1 What should I know about Seiler's Landscaping?

We're second-generation, family-owned, started in 1978. I purchased the business at the end of 2019. We're all high-end residential. This year, we'll finish right around \$4 million (in revenue), with about 35 employees. We're probably around 65 percent design/build, and the other 35 percent reoccurring maintenance. We are focused on building the residential maintenance accounts to get closer to 50/50. We've grown from about \$1.5 million to \$4 million over the last four years, so we're on a nice trajectory. Our goal is 10 million by 2030.

2 You live in Boulder, Colo., but the business is based in Cincinnati. How did that come about and is it difficult?

It's definitely a challenge, but we're getting better at it each year. I started working in the business in 2009, but I first put this remote ownership plan together in February of 2019, so I had 10 months to get organized and move forward with purchasing the business. That first year, I spent a week in Cincinnati, a week in Boulder, a week in Cincinnati, a week in Boulder. It was a lot. Now I spend about three or four days in Cincinnati a month. We do a company "all hands" meeting where we recap the last month and forecast what's ahead. It's working out well. We're building a nice foundation, we have a good team and I empower them to really own their roles.

3 What is your favorite tool to get the job done?

We use Aspire for our software needs, which gives us access to a bunch of data. The trick is choosing the right data to share. I'm a part of Jeffrey Scott's Leaders Edge Peer Group, and he shares a rolling budget template with all his clients. Before I joined the group, I didn't really use a rolling budget tool. It felt like quite a bit of work when I first started, but now I check it out two or three times a week. It's always open on my

desktop. There is an incredible amount of value in the benchmarking analysis.

4 Tell me about your family, and what do you all do for fun?

(My wife) Erin and I have two kids, Emmett just turned 2 and our daughter Avery is 6 months old. We like to explore the Colorado mountain towns. There's so much here within a three-hour drive. The hobby muscle is one we flex easily. I fly fish, we hike, ski and play golf. There are so many opportunities to enjoy Colorado. I'm looking forward to sharing that with our kids.

5 Do you have a most memorable day at work?

The most memorable day for me at Seiler's Landscaping was when I presented the idea of remote business ownership to my parents, the bank, our CPA and the attorneys. This business meant the world to my dad, and initially, the pitch felt strange and uncomfortable for everyone in the room. But it ended up going well, and I can vividly recall the expressions on their faces. I was able to get them to buy into the vision. I remember it as a dark and rainy day, and we were at the top of PNC Bank's office tower. They showed confidence in me, and I signed an SBA loan with my house as collateral. Afterward, we celebrated with a beer. This day stands out as the most memorable in my journey with Seiler's Landscaping. 

BEST ADVICE

"I love *The Man in the Arena* by Teddy Roosevelt. It gives me confidence that it's not the critic who counts. We keep going. As long as we stay true to our vision, we can't lose."



PHOTO: COURTESY OF SEILER'S LANDSCAPING



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.

Why taking calculated risks helps you grow beyond your budget

I'm a big believer in budgets. Your ability to manage monthly budgets tied to revenue and billable hours is critical. It is the difference between winning and losing.

However, proper budgeting is not enough for massive success. You must be willing to take chances and grab the big opportunities that will accelerate your progress.

I recently interviewed my good friends and clients, brothers Wade and Dustin Vugteveen of DeHamer Landscaping in Grand Rapids, Mich. We discussed the rapid growth of their business. It was clear they made big moves outside of their annual budgets.

(Listen to their full story on my podcast, *The Ultimate Landscape CEO*.)

OPPORTUNITIES OUTSIDE OF YOUR BUDGET

Wade reminded me that after their very first visit to my Leader's Edge peer group, he and his brother immediately decided to raise their game in snow and ice management.

After seeing the financial success of their peers in similar snow markets, they went big. They bought loaders, hired a salesperson and took a large, calculated risk.

The timing was right, and it paid off handsomely.

OVER HIRING

The first coaching assignment I gave them was to hire a professional office manager: an A+ player.

Hiring this office manager allowed Wade, the managing partner of the business, to get his hands out of bookkeeping and billing.

Amazingly (for their size), he was still doing it all.

They received 100 resumes and hired the top applicant. She took over for Wade and did his job better and faster.

Within two years, she also took over their installation division. She was raising the bar inside the company.

WHAT IS AN A+ PLAYER?

An A+ Player has the skills and experience to operate expertly at a higher future level. You are hiring for tomorrow when you bring in an A+ player today.

A+ players cost more. So, don't get hemmed in by frugality, especially when restructuring your own role. Stretch your hiring budget, and that person will stretch your organization.

FAST GROWTH CREATES A MESS

As DeHamer Landscaping began to scale quickly, things got messy. The owners needed a COO to pull together the loose ends as well as do the blocking and tackling.

They hired a proven implementer who had led a local electrical contractor to success. This new role was not in their budget, but fast growth dictated the need.

Needless to say, the investment paid off, and De Hamer Landscaping built a platform for even stronger, faster growth.

HIRING IS EASY

I hear repeatedly how difficult hiring is. You should not use this as an excuse to grow slowly. It just means you need to take a better approach. Here's two suggestions for how to do that:

1 Build a reputation as a destination company and you will attract and retain great employees. Past employees will clamor to get back in.

2 Use professional recruiters and headhunters to greatly widen your hiring pool.

SPECIAL SKILLS

Managing fast growth requires a specific set of skills. This includes:

1 Financial savvy and good financing. It requires access to cash, excellent operational margins and financial accountability up and down the organization.

2 Adaptability and innovation. The faster you grow, the quicker problems and opportunities will hit you head on. Dealing with them requires a strong and flexible team that can pivot while making thoughtful decisions.

3 Understanding the market. Growth is not arbitrary. It is driven by what's in the best interest of your clients and your team, and it fills unmet needs in the market that line up with your vision and mission.

Fast growth is a team sport. While you are considering your next bold move, you still need someone holding the team accountable, watching out for quality and service and managing your daily, weekly and monthly numbers. It takes a special team to scale quickly! 🏆





BY GREG HERRING

The author is the CEO of The Herring Group, financial leaders serving landscape companies. He can be reached at greg.herring@herring-group.com.

One owner's unconventional approach gets results, brings joy

I write a lot about life margin — the extra time and energy an owner no longer needs to invest in the company to make it successful.

Owners increase life margin when they build a management team — including professional financial leadership — install a business management software system and delegate responsibility and authority to many people in the company. These actions also increase the companies' operating profit margin. When owners get a life margin, they have time to discover their true joy as business owners.

Dave Fairburn, owner of North Point Outdoors in Derry, N.H., is one of those owners. We shared Dave's story on a webinar co-hosted by Aspire called "One Owner's Unconventional Thinking about People and Profits."

DATA-DRIVEN

Dave started out in the industry like so many others — mowing lawns and working as hard as possible. He joined forces with Andrew Pelkey, and the partners grew their company by saying yes to everything, grinding out 100-hour weeks and assuming profit and free time would come as a result.

They eventually learned that you can't simply work your way to profitability. They needed financial leadership and business management software. Accurate job costing and real-time financial data helped the company improve quickly.

As Fairburn says, "We grew from a hardworking landscape company into a profitable landscape company that also does hard work." Soon, the owners had a life margin.

As they became more profitable, the owners knew they did not want their company to be the type of firm that only rewarded ownership and management.

"In my world, who matters are the people who show up with work boots on, ready to rock and roll every day," Fairburn says.

To that end, he's proud of the initiatives North Point has implemented to support team members and drive success from the bottom up. Here are a few of those programs.

“In my world, who matters are the people who show up with work boots on, ready to rock and roll every day.”



BLEED BLUE TRUCKS

"Bleed Blue" is a slogan and hashtag used by North Point team members that refers to the deep-rooted loyalty the team feels toward each other and to the company. When two crew members approached their 10-year anniversaries, Fairburn bought two new company trucks — known as Bleed Blue 1 and Bleed Blue 2. He presented them to the two employees at a company party.

Other business owners have asked Fairburn, "What happens when 10 more people reach their 10-year marks?" His response: "I can't wait to buy those 10 trucks."

BLEED BLUE CARES

North Point's owners have quietly helped employees overcome financial hurdles for years. Last fall, the company funded the Bleed Blue Cares Program and opened it up to peer contributions. Employees can request money anonymously and a peer panel approves distributions.

"Sometimes life just hits a little harder than you want it to," Fairburn says. "We want people to stay focused and safe while they're at work without worrying about what's going on in their personal lives."

SMARTDOLLAR

In conjunction with the Cares fund, Fairburn wanted a way to help prevent team members from living in financial distress in the first place. He discovered SmartDollar, an employee financial wellness program from Dave Ramsey. It includes education and tools for budgeting, financial planning, investments and more. It's free for employees and costs the business about as much per user as a sweatshirt. Dave now hosts monthly SmartDollar meetings and has helped many employees get on a budget, get out of credit card debt and enroll in their 401(k).

In addition to bringing Dave joy, these programs improved company culture and led to one impressive result: North Point has a waiting list of applicants for several positions within the company.

None of these programs would have been attainable without a greater life margin and profit margin. Dave's story proves it's possible.



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BY BEN GANDY

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

Why personal margin matters to you and your business

Margin, in our financial world, is that gap between our cost and the price. It's the extra we need to pay our overhead and make a profit. More margin is better. Too little margin, and we're out of business.

But what about your personal margin?

If I had to guess, I'd say you're someone who rises early and hits the ground running with an endless to-do list, an overflowing calendar, a stream of activities that goes on far, far into the future. All these activities are the costs of your success, what you're willing to pay for a career and happy family.

I don't have to tell you that all that busyness takes its toll. There's a difference between being busy and grinding away. When our days become too full of activities, we lose personal margin.

WHAT IS PERSONAL MARGIN

Leaders need time to think, to dream, to read, to listen and to plan. As a leader, your perspective on your

organization is unique. You can see your organization in an informed way that no one else can. You owe it to your organization to think, dream and plan (and to your family and yourself). If you don't, who will?

But thinking and dreaming require margin, time not impinged upon by immediate, urgent demands. A gap between all the "doing" and the results.

This is not about vacations (which you should certainly take). This is about building in daily, weekly and quarterly time where you set aside the doing and the demands and free yourself to explore what's in your head and on your mind.

Doing this will likely require that something gets pushed. You may need to rob Peter to pay Paul. You may need to rob from something to buy your personal margin.

You could rob your family. Those kids are going to grow up with or without you and your spouse will understand, right? Maybe not. Cutting attention to your family is never going to work.

You could rob your health. You can always get to the gym later in life after the kids are grown. All you have to do is survive the first heart attack. Bad idea.

You could rob from your business. For many of you, this is personal. This is where you need personal margin the most. This is where your leadership insights matter.

HOW TO TAKE BACK PERSONAL MARGIN

How do you rob from your

business in a way that doesn't torpedo the organization?

1 Delegate. Don't look for one or two things that you could delegate to someone else. Look to delegate as much as possible. Delegation doesn't mean abdication or dumping on others who are unprepared. Delegation takes time. Start now.

2 Put blinders on. There are thousands of things to attend to in your business. You're not going to get to them all. You may need to internally "not see" some of the issues that are calling for attention but are less impactful on the organization. The perfectionist is groaning. You can't tolerate mediocrity forever, but in the big game, what the water boy is up to is just not as important as what the players are doing. Learn to ignore the trivial and prioritize.

3 Run to the sound of gunfire. In battle, soldiers respond to the action. When problems erupt, set everything else aside and react. Most problems get worse, not better. The longer they go on, the worse they get. Act fast and follow through. Letting problems fester will erode your margin.

Gaining some personal margin is not a luxury of leadership, it's a responsibility. Peter Anderton's two rules of leadership tell us that, No. 1, the efforts of the people who work with you propel the organization forward. Leaders need personal margin to think about, listen to, appreciate and understand their people. And No. 2, your personal growth, insights, maturity and capability either propel the organization or constrain it.

You need a personal margin if you're to be a gift and a benefit to the team, your family and yourself. 🙏



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RESOURCES

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Landscape Management highlights interesting and photogenic projects for its Water World feature. Has your operation recently completed a noteworthy project? Do you have photos of installation and completion? If so, drop LM Editor Christina Herrick a note at **cherrick@northcoastmedia.net** and the project may be featured in an upcoming issue.



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GROW WITH GRUNDER

BY MARTY GRUNDER

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



Put your marketing materials to work for your business

Organic leads coming in to Grunder Landscaping Co. slowed in 2023 compared to what we saw in the past three years. I know from speaking with our peer group members that companies across the country are facing the same challenge. As our sales team fights to hit their goals, we've renewed our focus on marketing efforts to make sure we're dialed in.

I'm excited that at GROW! 2024 Feb. 6-8 in Des Moines, Iowa, Emily Lindley from our team at The Grow Group and Grunder Landscaping Co. will lead a session where she shares her strategy for printed materials, what she includes on them and why and what we're using them for at GLC as we continue to drive leads and replenish our sales backlog.

Emily holds a degree from Miami University's Farmer School of Business. Before joining our team at The Grow Group more than five years ago, she worked in public relations and corporate communications at a large health insurer. In her role with us, she oversees our content strategy, sets the agendas for our events and manages the marketing at Grunder Landscaping Co.

At GROW!, she's going to share the strategies you can use to make your marketing more effective in her session, "The Anatomy of Printed Materials." She'll go into more detail about the following:

1 FILTER YOUR MESSAGE

What does your audience care about? Our ideal audience doesn't

“Our messaging focuses more on the end result, the experience and the functionality of different features.”

Speak the same language we do as landscape professionals. At Grunder Landscaping Co., our ideal clients are people who enjoy not doing their landscaping on their own.

While some of them may know a thing or two about plants or landscape construction, most of them just want reassurance that we will do the work the right way and that it will look good when it's done.

So, our marketing needs to speak to these people and talk about what they care about. That means our messaging focuses more on the end result, the experience and the functionality of different features. When we do talk about the process or the materials, we use a common language anyone would understand.

2 HAVE A CLEAR CTA

A clear call to action, or CTA, improves the performance of your marketing efforts because it tells people what you want them to do next.

Bonus tip: some of your clients may prefer to call and speak to someone, while others might prefer an online form. Make it easy for your clients to do business with you using their preferred communication method.

3 OUTDO THE COMPETITION

You won't be the only landscaping company mailing postcards, so how do you make yours stand out? Professional-looking marketing materials set the tone for the type of company your prospects can expect to work with.

Some elements that can elevate how your materials look:

- Large, clear images of work you've done
- Concise text that's easy to skim
- Design elements that are consistent with your brand

Making your printed pieces stand out from the competition can help you draw more attention, and therefore, more leads.

We've put together some examples of the materials we use at Grunder Landscaping Co., so you can see what they look like. Head to our lead generation page to download them.



Use this QR code to see our lead generation page.

I hope you're already signed up to join us at GROW! 2024 Feb. 6-8, but if you aren't, what are you waiting for? We have a fantastic event planned and can't wait to see so many faces (both new and familiar) at this event.

The community that joins us each year is really special for their willingness to share new ideas and commitment to learning and getting better. Will you be part of it?

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