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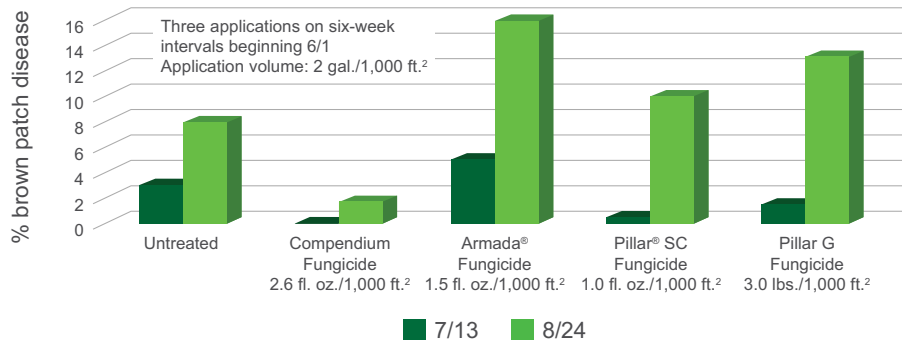
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[ KEEP US IN THE KNOW ]

## We want to hear from you!

Has your company recently purchased new compact equipment? Have you recently installed an interesting irrigation project? Do you have a secret formula for drought-stressed lawns? If so, we want to know! Email Editor-in-Chief Seth Jones ([sjones@northcoastmedia.net](mailto:sjones@northcoastmedia.net)) or Associate Editor Rob DiFranco ([rdifranco@northcoastmedia.net](mailto:rdifranco@northcoastmedia.net)) and you could be featured in an upcoming LM story!

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## SETH JONES EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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## Wonder what's next

**W**ell, this one is going to be weird to write ... because I want to stress that this is not goodbye. This is 'wait for what's next!'

Last month, the timing was just perfect. To celebrate the entrance of spring and the growing season ahead of us, on this page, I shared a photo of me and my local lawn care applicator, taken a few hours before we went to press.

This month, the timing is again fortuitous. As I write this page (the last page I write of every issue), only hours ago, we shared this news with our readers: we hired a new Editor-in-Chief for *Landscape Management*. His name is Scott Hollister and I'm so excited to introduce you to him.

A little history here: Scott and I were co-workers from 1999 to 2012 when we both worked on the magazine *Golf Course Management* (GCM), the official publication of the Golf Course Super-

**“We knew we wanted someone who could come in on day one and have the connections and the experience in the green industry to make an immediate impact. That was the moment I decided to text Scott.”**

intendents Association of America. In 2012, I was hired away by North Coast Media to lead the magazine *Golfdom*, a competitor to GCM. I was young(er) and eager for the opportunity to lead a magazine on my own.

In the ensuing years, I think it's OK to say that things have gone well. So well, in fact, that a little over five years ago I was asked if I would lead both *LM* and *Golfdom* in a dual role — working as Editor-in-Chief over both publications. I said yes to the promotion (of course) and I'm thankful I did; the people I've met and the places I've seen over the last 64 issues have been remarkable.

But with staff turnover and the continued growth of the magazine, a change was necessary. We knew we needed another veteran editor on the magazine, and we knew we wanted someone who could

come in on day one and have the connections and the experience in the green industry to make an immediate impact. That was the moment I decided to text Scott — to invite him to 23rd Street Brewery in Lawrence, Kan., so I could ask the question, 'Can I talk to you about an opportunity I have at *Landscape Management* magazine?'

Scott spent 26 years working for GCM, so it was not an easy move for him. But after multiple lunches, meetings and phone calls ... I'm excited to tell you that Scott is again my co-worker.

I will move into the role of Editorial Director of *LM*, which is a fancy way of saying, 'I get to do what I want to!' I will also maintain my position as Editor-in-Chief of *Golfdom*, a job I've had for 13 years.

Once the news went out today, Scott's LinkedIn account erupted with new LinkedIn connection requests. That didn't surprise me. He might be new to you, and you might be new to him, but he isn't new to the green industry. I know he's the perfect person to come in and build upon what the team has been doing for the past five years: creating the most trusted, valued, *best* magazine in the industry.

I hope you've enjoyed the last five years of this magazine and found the content useful. Trust me when I say that you'll be seeing more from me and all your friends at *LM* — in person, online and in the magazine — soon.

I wonder what's next? 🍷



**TAKE ME OUT TO THE BALL GAME** Perhaps a harbinger moment, this month a year ago the guys all caught a Red Sox game at Fenway Park. From left to right are Mark LaFleur, communications lead, turf and landscapes, Syngenta; Bill Roddy, publisher, *Landscape Management*; Craig MacGregor, associate publisher, *Landscape Management*; Seth Jones, editorial director, *Landscape Management* and Scott Hollister, the magazine's new editor-in-chief, who will start with the magazine next month.





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# EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD



## MORE ONLINE

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

## What's the best piece of advice you've ever been given?



**"Follow the Ten Commandments and the Golden Rule!"**

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**"Don't borrow money."**



**"Your business is either your baby or your mistress. Make it your baby. The late, great Clay Mathile, the owner of Iams shared that with me. Think about it, it's a wonderful piece of advice."**



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



# LM GALLERY

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

**1 Family reunion** During his visit to Davey Tree's Kent, Ohio, headquarters, **LM** Senior Digital Specialist Joey Ciccolini (right) stopped to say hi to his cousin, Joseph Rubino, who works for Davey in the company's customer service department.

**2 Welcome wagon** Members of Davey Tree's Corporate Communications team helped guide guests through the company's headquarters during its celebration of 45 years of being employee-owned. From left to right: Josh Reuck, Jill Golden, Whitney Randolph, Steph Donovan, Jillian Schrift, Helen Thompson, Jen Lennox and Megan Bowers.

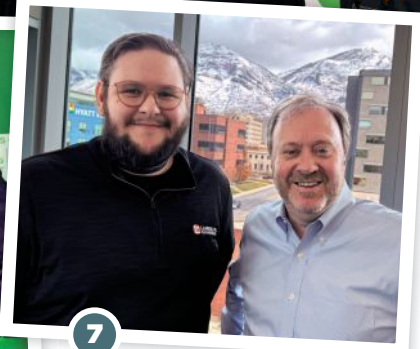
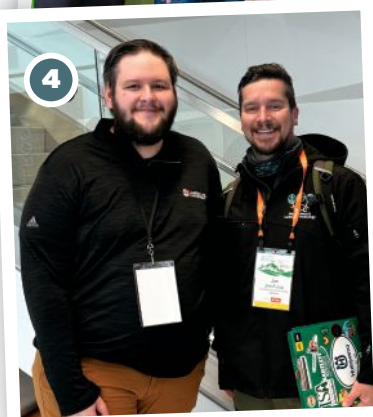
**3 One-man band** Chuck Stangel, landscape and horticulture instructor at Fox Valley Technical College in Appleton, Wis., (center) took home \$1,500 for his students for winning the cheer competition at the National Collegiate Landscape Competition (NCLC). Read **LM's** NCLC recap on page 10.

**4 From CLE to SLC** **LM** Associate Editor Rob DiFranco (left) snaps a picture with a fellow Cleveland, Jim Funai, Ph.D., assistant professor of plant and landscape technology at Cuyahoga County Community College (Tri-C). Tri-C fell just short of repeating as NCLC champions.

**5 Ben and Ken** **LM** columnists and Envisor Principals Ben Gandy and Ken Thomas were all smiles at the NCLC career fair.

**6 The Grovers take on Provo** Bob Grover (left), president of Pacific Landscape Management in Hillsboro, Ore., and his son, David, branch manager at Pacific Landscape Management and NCLC chairperson, pose for a picture on the main stage after the NCLC opening ceremony.

**7 Long time no see** DiFranco and NALP CEO Britt Wood both attended their first NCLC at NC State in 2022. Two years later — now a pair of grizzled young green industry veterans — the two caught up, with a view of the Wasatch mountain range behind them.



## Highlights from the National Collegiate Landscape Competition

BY ROB DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

**T**he National Collegiate Landscape Competition (NCLC) returned to Brigham Young University (BYU) in Provo, Utah, bringing students from 50 universities together with industry representatives.

The result was a bevy of opportunities for the industry to grow, not only in numbers but with ideas from a diverse group of students.

“(NCLC) really gets you excited about what the future holds,” said Britt Wood, NALP CEO. “We have so many great young people here — we’re up nearly 100 kids — so it’s really exciting to see more and more new young people enthusiastic about our industry.”

### THREE YEARS IN

The 2022 NCLC at North Carolina State was Wood’s first as CEO of NALP — after COVID-19 forced its cancellation in 2020 and a virtual competition in 2021. Now, with three events under his belt, Wood says he feels more ingrained in the green industry.

“I feel like I have a better sense of (the industry),” Wood told *LM*. “At NC State, I was bumping into things that I didn’t know. My goal this year was to have witnessed every single competition and get a good feel for it.”

### THE HOSTS WITH THE MOST

BYU placed two teams in the top five, including the top spot. The university’s Provo-campus team won the event for the second time in three years, and students from the Idaho campus finished in fourth place.

### ONE-MAN BAND

At the NCLC’s opening ceremony, attendees from all 50 schools participated in the “Roll Call” a chant competition that leads directly into the industry expo.

The winner was a first-time attendee,



Chuck Stangel of Fox Valley Tech was a crowd favorite at the NCLC opening ceremony.

Chuck Stangel, landscape and horticulture instructor at Fox Valley Technical College in Appleton, Wis. Stangel — a former landscape architect with more than 30 years of industry experience — led a chant spelling out “FVTC,” and drew massive support from the crowd.


Stangel was the lone representative from Fox Valley in Provo but said his students will be in attendance next year.

“I just joined NALP recently and we didn’t have the time to get well organized,” Stangel said. “I figured I’d come this year and learn about the event. We’re going to organize a group next year to come back with me.”

Fox Valley Tech offers two-year technical diplomas and two associate degree programs. The school’s horticulture and landscape program currently has 50 students.

### STAYING OUT WEST

The NCLC will stay west in 2025, heading to Colorado State University. According to Wood, NALP has several changes to the schedule and events planned for 2025.

“The scheduling is going to feel really different (in 2025),” he told *LM*. “Our goal is to ensure that this great population of students comes here and gets to interact with the industry. The hope is that every single student comes out of this feeling more passionate about a potential career in landscape, and hopefully having a job.” 

### IN MEMORIAM: BRODIE BRUNER OF WEATHERMATIC

It is with great sadness that *LM* reports on the loss of a friend of the magazine and a friend of the industry. Brodie Bruner, executive vice president of Weathermatic, passed away last month. He was 49.

Bruner was a husband and a father of three. A graduate of Baylor University, Bruner joined Weathermatic right after college and never left. He was passionate about saving water as well as delivering clean drinking water to impoverished countries. Over the last 10 years, 30,000 people and 100 communities have been impacted by Bruner’s and Weathermatic’s efforts.

A frequent guest on *LM*’s YouTube channel, *LM*’s Editor-in-Chief Seth Jones once tried to catch Bruner off-guard with a surprise question: did his Baylor Bears have what it takes to win it all? “(The basketball) I see is making me start to believe,” Bruner said. “(Coach) Scott Drew, our Baylor Bears, they’ve got what it takes.”

The Bears went on to win the 2021 national championship, beating Villanova 86-70.



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### **IT'S A PEOPLE BUSINESS**

"I love the people first and foremost," says Weed Man CEO Jennifer Lemcke, a lifetime member of the green industry.





# THE LM CONVERSATION: JENNIFER LEMCKE

INTERVIEW BY SETH JONES  
LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**Jennifer Lemcke, CEO of Weed Man, Mosquito Hero and TurfBot**, has grown up in the industry. Her father bought his first Weed Man franchise when she was a teenager. She has worked in every facet of the company, including operating her own chain of Weed Man franchises for six years.

Since 2020, Lemcke has served as the CEO of Weed Man, the No. 10 ranked company on the *LM150* list, with a revenue of \$308 million in 2022.

"I like to manage with my sleeves rolled up, side-by-side with the franchisees," Lemcke tells *LM*. "That's my space. I love to do that. I love to dig in if there's an issue. I don't like to manage from the boardroom. I love to get in there and I think that has built trust with my franchisees. It opens up communication and solidifies trust."

Lemcke sat down with *LM* to discuss her expectations for 2024, what she sees happening with private equity dollars and about a surprising super-group of lawn care industry giants formed during COVID.



## **LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT: WHAT IS YOUR FORECAST FOR 2024 AND BEYOND — FOR WEED MAN AND THE INDUSTRY AS A WHOLE?**

**JENNIFER LEMCKE:** For us, we're looking in 2024 for another double-digit growth year and that's tough to do without doing acquisitions. We have grown organically, one customer, one franchisee and one owner at a time. You're seeing a lot of activity in our industry right now with private equity. They're coming in and they're doing large acquisitions and melding brands and melding different companies. There's a big shake-up going on in our industry. It used to be TruGreen that was doing all the acquisitions, and Scott's for a time. They kind of backed out of that space. We're seeing (what it was like) back in the 1990s and 2000s with all of the acquisitions happening. I feel like you're seeing a lot more of a competitive landscape, especially in the marketing space. The digital marketing space rubbing up against a lot of these private equities that are pumping a lot of money into it.

*Continued on page 14*

**LM 150**

Weed Man is the No. 10 ranked company on the LM150 list, with a revenue of \$308 million in 2022.

*Continued from page 13*

It'll be interesting to see over the next five years if you're going to have some players that are going to return to the marketplace after their noncompetes are up, and what exactly private equity is going to do inside of our industry while they're here. We're trying to find our space. I can't imagine the lawn operator owner out there that's figuring out what's our next step and they're trying to market their business and they're trying to grow their business. They've got some pretty deep pockets to come up against.

We're adjusting and we're able to adjust because we just have phenomenal business owners inside of our network. We share everything and we really are able to pivot together very quickly.



**LM: DO YOU THINK PRIVATE EQUITY WILL CONTINUE ON THIS PATH FOR THE FORESEEABLE FUTURE?**

**OR DO YOU THINK IT WILL SLOW DOWN?**

**LEMCKE:** I'm not seeing a slowdown. Private equity has been very present in the franchising

space and seems to have gotten even more active in the home services market where there's a huge opportunity. You're seeing anywhere where there's an opportunity, private equity is there. You've got a lot more people that are aging baby boomers. You got millennials that are coming into the space that are buying homes.

I think our industry is going to continue to be healthy. I think it'll still continue to garner private equity interest. It seems like, with private equity, from what I've seen, and I know I'm generalizing here, it's usually a five-year cycle. Private equity will come in, buy the companies out, put their fingerprints on it and grow the brand, really, really pump up the EBITDA and then they typically spin it off to another private equity and then there's another three- to five-year cycle that happens.

I don't think the headlines are quite done yet. I think we'll see continued activity in our space and then probably in that cycle will come more different private equities that'll come in and buy out some existing brands.

*Continued on page 16*



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Continued from page 14



**LM: LET'S TALK ABOUT FRANCHISING IN GENERAL ... WHAT ARE SOME QUESTIONS A BUSINESS OWNER SHOULD CONSIDER BEFORE LOOKING INTO JOINING A FRANCHISOR?**

**LEMCKE:** Before you look at a franchise, you need to make sure it's a good fit. Talk to others who have done it before you — whether it's with Weed Man or another franchise system. We are very diligent with our candidates to make sure that they call other franchisees. One, there are certain things with franchising laws that we can't disclose. Probably, at the top of my mind, how much money can I make? Well, we can't really tell them that because they're very strict on what we can and cannot say. But an independent Weed Man franchisee could tell them. They are very open with information.

And then when you're becoming a franchisee, you are partnering with that brand and

*Continued on page 18*



**“BELIEVE IT OR NOT, ALL THE LARGE COMPETITORS ALL WORK TOGETHER. DURING COVID, WE'D ASK EACH OTHER, ‘ARE YOU GOING OUT, ARE THE TRUCKS ROLLING TODAY? WHAT'S GOING ON?’”**

JENNIFER LEMCKE

PHOTO: WEED MAN

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Scan here to find out more  
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To learn more about the Spring Green Industry Associates Program and the benefits of owning a Spring Green business call **1-800-777-8608** or visit [www.springgreenfranchise.com](http://www.springgreenfranchise.com)

This information is not intended as an offer to sell, or solicitation of an offer to buy a franchise. It is for informational purposes only. Currently, the following states regulate the offer and sale of a franchise: CA, HI, IL, IN, MD, NY, ND, OR, RI, SD, VA, WA, and WI. If you are a resident of one of those states, we will not offer you a franchise unless and until we have complied with applicable pre-sale registration and disclosure requirements in your jurisdiction.

*Continued from page 16*

you need to feel comfortable. We look like a shiny new car at the beginning, but you need to talk to franchisees that have been through our new dealer training. What does that look like? What does the support look like? Are you happy with your decision?

Those are some of the key questions that franchisees would be answering negatively if it was a bad experience. We're very blessed that we don't have any of those and by and large, our franchisees are very happy.



**LM: IS THERE A RIGHT SIZE OF A BUSINESS THAT YOU LOOK FOR, THAT MAKES FOR AN IDEAL CANDIDATE TO BECOME A FRANCHISEE?**

**LEMCKE:** Our experience has been we've been able to help offices or companies that were either doing landscaping and maybe dabbling in lawn care and just really hadn't taken off that section of their business. We've been able to help quite a few landscapers expand that portfolio. Or we had some landscapers, they were subbing it out and wondered, 'Is this something that I'd like to do in-house?' We are able to give them the systems and the

tools to be able to add that service on.

We've been very successful in doing that. We actually have had quite a few golf course superintendents who have joined us. We just seem to fit into a mid to large-size company that is looking to add systems and lawn care to their portfolio of services offered.



**LM: YOU'VE GROWN UP IN THE INDUSTRY, FROM WHEN YOUR DAD BOUGHT HIS FRANCHISE WHEN YOU WERE 16. WHAT IS IT LIKE TO HAVE YOUR JOB — DO YOU LOVE WHAT YOU DO?**

**LEMCKE:** I love the people first and foremost. I am blessed with working not only with a head office team that's amazing, also that the average tenure is over 15 years. Some of our employees have been working with me for almost 30 years. I'm blessed to be surrounded by some incredible talent and a lot of institutional knowledge.

Second, we have partners across the U.S. that we call our sub-franchisers that really help support our franchisees. They've built an incredible relationship with their franchisees and with the head office. We are 100 percent in it together. I love that about my job.

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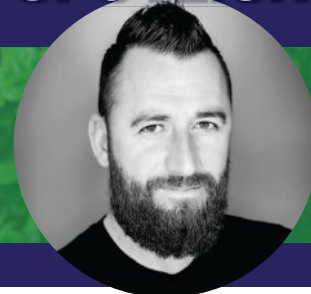
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## CHASE COATES

President - Outback Landscape

## THEN

Like many of us, Chase Coates grew up in the landscape business. At the age of 14, he created a maintenance-focused landscape business called Outback Landscape. After eight years Outback had grown, but Chase was still struggling to expand and find good people. He was concerned about the future of Outback, so he reached out for help after hearing Marty Grunder speak.

## NOW

Today, Outback Landscape is a thriving 8-figure business with unlimited potential. Chase attributes his success to two things: his relentless focus on hiring the best people and taking care of them; and joining ACE Peer Groups. As an ACE member, Chase surrounded himself with other motivated owners, building valuable relationships that brought fresh insights and fueled his drive to continually raise the bar.

*It's how you treat people and how you take care of them... That's what sets you apart.*

CHASE COATES

## CHASE'S 3 KEYS:

1. **Standards:** setting business standards and benchmarks are critical for continued growth and success
2. **Improvement:** a culture striving for continuous improvement builds and maintains operational excellence
3. **Community:** finding support and accountability with a peer group builds knowledge, confidence and resilience



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**FOR THE PEOPLE, BY THE PEOPLE** The best way to learn more about a franchise, and if it might be a good fit, is to ask current franchisees who can give a detailed inside look at their day-to-day operations and profitability.

LM: WHAT ADVICE  
DO YOU HAVE FOR  
THE INDUSTRY?

**LEMCKE:** That we need to protect our industry. We need to market ourselves and get the customers and all that, but we also have to focus on protecting the industry. This goes back to why I'm now involved heavily with the NALP (National Association of Landscape Professionals) but in a different way. And it actually came through during COVID. Believe it or not, all the large competitors all work together. During COVID, we'd ask each other, 'Are you going out? Are the trucks going out? What's going on?'

I was on the phone with all my competitors on a regular basis and we really helped each other through a lot of tough situations and scary situations. From that,

we started to meet on a monthly basis and we continue to meet on a monthly basis with Andrew Bray (senior vice president of government relations and membership, NALP) and Bob Mann (senior director of technical and regulatory affairs, NALP). It's TruGreen, Senske, myself, Lawn Doctor and Spring Green — we meet and we talk about the industry and we want to make sure that not only do we put out fires, but also be proactive in some areas, at the state level. It's a great meeting and we're all friends ... we rib each other. It's a good group of folks.

I think it's important that people understand some of the big players are very active. It may not seem like it, but we are very active in the background supporting some initiatives that are happening at the local area. 📍

# ASKING TOUGH QUESTIONS

We asked five franchisors what they felt was most important for a business owner to ask him or herself before pursuing a franchising opportunity. Here is what they said

BY SETH JONES  
LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

## James Young COO, Spring Green

'Why are you getting into the business to begin with, what is the desired outcome and how hard do you want to work at it?'

Many of our owners are already entrepreneurs in the green industry. Nothing keeps them from getting into the residential lawn care and pest control business. When they look at Spring Green they are seeking a few things;

### Diversification/wealth building

— how do they leverage what they have without taking their eye off the current business and build a recurring revenue business that can be transferred to family or sold in the future?

**They don't want to reinvent the wheel** — time is now valuable, so an industry franchise that can pair



with their existing business makes sense. The marketing ecosystem for residential marketing is evolving daily and the cost and time to create and manage a marketing program seems ambitious. Leveraging Spring Green's marketing service team — who does it for you — planning through execution and utilizing the contact center to handle the volume of spring sales calls just makes sense.

### BE HEARD

After joining a franchise, franchisors say it's important to ask questions and challenge any existing processes for the betterment of everyone involved.

**Knowledge is power** — At a certain stage of business ownership, you begin seeing the value of being part of something bigger and getting access to other like-minded owners who deal with the same day-to-day challenges and those that have similar aspirations for the why and what they are building. The nature of a franchise organization is to leverage best practices and facilitate collective knowledge sharing. Spring Green goes a step further with its peer groups, national training events and business consultants who take their owners through an annual business and marketing planning process.

Continued on page 22



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**DAVE WASKEY**

Louisville, Myrtle Beach,  
& Bloomington

"One of the biggest draws for me was simply the scalability of it, how quickly you can scale Weed Man up. It's not only theory, but it has been practiced and proven."



**NATE DEVISSER**

Kalamazoo & South Bend

"Franchising with Weed Man is the best decision we've ever made – not just because of revenue, but because we enjoy it and we enjoy the people we get to work with."



**DAN UROHART**

Kawartha Lakes,  
Peterborough, & Port Hope

"It started with myself and my wife. We had 2 trucks and 3 technicians... Now we've got contiguous territory down to Lake Ontario with 3 depots in each territory. We're going to continue to serve our customers and grow."

Weed Man has truly lived up to its reputation as the fastest growing lawn care company in North America, reporting record-breaking growth in 2023. With 15 expansions and 12 new acquisitions, it's clear that Weed Man franchisees are not just satisfied with their investment; they're on fire to grow!

Take the Hillenmeyer family, for example. Helmed by father Stephen Hillenmeyer and sons Seth and Chase, what began as a four-truck operation in Lexington, KY in the early 2000s, with a foundation of six generations (and hundreds of years) of family experience in the green industry, has grown to a thriving four-site lawn care business that services homeowners in Lexington, Cincinnati, Nashville, and now Memphis.

The success of Weed Man franchisees is built upon the twin pillars of training and support. When you become a Weed Man franchise owner, you're equipped with all aspects of the business operations, including administration, technical expertise, marketing, thorough business planning, and budgeting. You're also supported by an experienced regional business consultant and mentor who is dedicated to your success.

And success certainly seems to be the name of the game at Weed Man. With more than \$350 million in total system sales, 62% of franchisees earned more than \$1 million in revenue in 2023. And nearly 70% of Weed Man's franchisees have been so successful in their business that they have continued to purchase and service additional territory under the Weed Man brand – and that's not to mention the successful sub-brand, Mosquito Hero, that is also available to all Weed Man franchisees at no additional startup cost.

Now is the time to join Weed Man's incredible network of franchise owners. Start growing your business today.

**\$350+ MILLION**

in total system sales.

**62%**

of Weed Man franchisees earned over \$1 million in revenue in 2023.

**NEARLY 70%**

of franchisees have been so successful in the system that they continue to purchase additional territory.

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Best lawn care company by Forbes & #2 best franchise to buy at a low investment level.

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*Continued from page 20*

### Josh Wise CEO, GrassRoots Turf

You really have to make sure that you're passionate about what you're doing and you're not buying a business because, 'Oh, it's going to make great money.'

Obviously, we want to get into business to make good money and to have a good lifestyle, but if you're just chasing the dollar and you're not passionate about it, you're not going to be that successful. I always want to make sure that first, there's a passion for the green industry. They're in a situation where they can devote the time that it's going to take. A lot of potential business owners don't realize the nights, the weekends, the long hours. There's a lot that goes into making sure you're successful.

A big challenge with potential franchisees that are starting up a business is they need to be able to follow systems. But they also need to not be afraid to question things. I think that's what really makes a franchise system really good, is having the power of several different paths. Everybody that comes into the franchise system, they all come with some sort of background and everybody can bring something to the system to make it even more powerful. I encourage all of our franchisees to speak up, to challenge the systems, to try to figure out how can we get our cancellations rate a little bit lower and our retention higher.

*Continued on page 24*



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- ✓ Average Net Profit - 17.3%
  - After Royalties and Owner Compensation

\*This is Up 2.8% from the Prior 12 Month Period.

\*See item 19 of our 2023 FDD for further details. This is the performance of the 186 franchised territories open the entire 2022-2023 accounting period. This information is not intended as an offer to sell a franchise. It is for informational purposes only.

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**Matthew Motyka, Director of Franchise Development**  
(717) 572-0297 | [matt.motyka@eversmithbrands.com](mailto:matt.motyka@eversmithbrands.com)  
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"Our landscape team went from a five person crew down to two and maintained the same level of production."

- Jamie Feie  
Supreme Scapes  
Cincinnati, OH

*Continued from page 22*

If you're looking at getting into a franchise, first you do a gut-check. You make sure that you're really passionate about the business you're looking at getting into and then you've got a support team around you. And then you should be successful with it.

### Ken Hutcheson

President, U.S. Lawns



You have to look beyond the values and the tools, the systems and the processes (of a franchisor). Let's look for one thing that I think that would create magic in their business. Are they passionate about the industry that they're going to get involved in? Do they have a connection to the industry? Can they become passionate about it? Because if they don't like dealing with commercial customers, they don't like dealing with employees, if they don't enjoy the landscape service or snow and ice business, it's not going to work. It just isn't.

This is not an absentee owner business or a simple investment. This requires involvement. Can you end up owning five or six units? Can you end up having general managers to where you're not in the field? Oh, in a heartbeat. But going into it, they need to really sit back and ask, 'Do I see myself in a service business?'

*Continued on page 26*



**COMMUNITY BUILDING** For some, joining a franchise is like gaining instant access to a group of peer consultants all across the country.

PHOTO: U.S. LAWN



# A Leader in Outdoor Pest Control Franchising



a neighborly company



## Lou Schager, CFE

*Brand President of Mosquito Joe®,  
a Neighborly® Company*

### **Q: Why should any outdoor service professional consider owning an outdoor pest control franchise like Mosquito Joe?**

**A:** We are proud that our Mosquito Joe services bring health and happiness to families and their pets across America. Our full line of outdoor pest control services combat perimeter pests such as ants, spiders, and cockroaches from entering a home and complements our signature mosquito and tick services to ensure outside is fun again for families. Just as important is Mosquito Joe's commitment to eco-friendly services, which demonstrates our dedication to providing effective greener services and education of environmentally responsible methods to control outdoor pests.

### **Q: What does the support from the Mosquito Joe franchisor look like to their business owners?**

**A:** We support Owners throughout the startup phase of their business through a robust training plan. Our Owners come from all walks of life so having prior experience in pest control

isn't a requirement. We have Urban Entomologists on staff that have created a comprehensive field training plan. We hold an extensive training course at our corporate office

where new Owners learn about our business model, operations, marketing, and any other information required to become experts in the pest control industry. We have an expert marketing team that provides custom local marketing plans, website creation and optimization, content creation, social media and numerous other valuable assets that grow brand awareness and customer recruitment.

### **Q: What does the opening process look like for Mosquito Joe?**

**A:** The startup phase for business owners can take a few months. In addition to on-site training, our Franchise Business Coaches and Urban Entomologists take a hands-on approach and visit each new Owner's place of business to delve deeper into their specific start-up needs to ensure a successful launch.

### **Q: What personal background or experience would you say makes a great fit for the Mosquito Joe brand and its culture?**

**A:** Our team seeks candidates who hold "PHDs", which stands for Passionate, Hungry and Driven. It's our fun way to describe the qualities we feel provide the foundation for a successful Owner. Mosquito Joe Owners have come from backgrounds that are wide and varied, to include military veterans, corporate finance, nurses and physicians, pilots, and first responders to name just a few. In short, we look for prospective Owners who exude positivity as this commonly translates into confidence to connect with their community to establish long-term customer relationships and an enduring, profitable business.



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Franchise Guide,  
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Continued from page 24



**Rob Palmer**  
President,  
Lawn Squad

I'll be as candid as I can be. I've been my own owner, I've been my own man for 23 years and I wasn't sure about this franchising thing. I wondered is franchising the way to go?

What I realized was I would go to all these conferences. I'd go to the *Landscape Management Growth Summit*, I'd go to *Elevate*, the *NALP's* conference, I'd go to the *Ohio Turfgrass Conference*. I was going on site visits to other lawn care companies throughout the country. At the same time, I'm using consultants. When I broke it all down, when I really got thinking about

franchising, I'm thinking, well, I'm already seeking help. I'm trying to be part of a bigger organization to get information. That's what a franchise is. It's a whole ecosystem where we basically have our own peer group, we have our own entities, whether it's a Lawn Squad in Boston or a Lawn Squad in Chicago or Lawn Squad in Georgia, we're discussing best practices amongst ourselves.

We've created this entire ecosystem where with the backing and support of authority brands, we have marketing experts, we have sales experts, we've got folks that help you onboard your business, set up your bank accounts, get your insurance... We have negotiated rates with vendors on trucks and equipment. What I found out is while I wasn't a franchise the previous 23 years, I was paying consulting fees to folks to come in and help

**"I'M TRYING TO BE PART OF A BIGGER ORGANIZATION TO GET INFORMATION. THAT'S WHAT A FRANCHISE IS."**

ROB PALMER

me. And really that's what a franchise is.

You're buying a business in a box, and of course you're paying a royalty, but it's no different than hiring a consultant or attending these conferences on your own. I don't look at that royalty rate as an expense to the business. I look at it as an investment to the business because all the resources that come with the business.

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■ **Josh Sevick**  
**Group President,**  
**Neighborly, The Grounds**  
**Guys and Lawn Pride**



I'd encourage people to ask questions like, 'Do we feel the need to create our own path?' Some people are hyper-entrepreneurs, they don't feel comfortable just executing and being successful — they have to do it their way. It's not right or wrong, it's just part of their entrepreneurial spirit. So, do you feel comfortable using someone else's systems and processes? Is success making the bottom-line dollar for you, or is it building something that was part of your creative process? That's a good question to test whether franchising might be right for you.

Another would be, 'Do you want to be engaged in something for the foreseeable future, like a 10-year contract?' When people are getting into contracts with a franchise organization, it's usually a 5- to 10-year agreement. You're hitching your wagon to a franchisor. You better trust them and want to coexist with them. If you don't have the confidence that you want to be in that space for an indefinite period of time, franchising might not be the right fit for you. 📧

## Guide to franchisors

If we missed your franchising company, let us know by emailing [sjones@northcoastmedia.net](mailto:sjones@northcoastmedia.net)

### Augusta Lawn Care

Services offered: Mowing, landscaping, hardscaping, property cleanups, snow and ice and lawn care.  
[augustalawncareservices.com](http://augustalawncareservices.com)

### Canopy Lawn Care

Services offered: Lawn care  
[canopylawncares.com](http://canopylawncares.com)

### Christmas Décor/Nite Time Décor

Services offered: Artificial lighting and outdoor lighting systems.  
[nitetimedecor.com](http://nitetimedecor.com)

### Clean Air Lawn Care

Services offered: Lawn mowing, landscape maintenance and lawn care.  
[cleanairlawncares.com](http://cleanairlawncares.com)

*Continued on page 28*

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*Continued from page 27*

## **Conserva Irrigation**

Services offered: Installation, irrigation repair and maintenance.  
**conservairrigation.com**

## **Dryject**

Services offered: Aeration and topdressing.  
**dryject.com**

## **Enviro Masters Lawn Care**

Services offered: Lawn care services, fertilization and aeration, weed removal and lawn-pest control.  
**enviromasters.com**

## **Freedom Lawns USA**

Services offered: Fertilization, weed control, pest control, disease control and plant health care.  
**freedomlawnsusa.com**

## **GrassRoots Turf**

Services offered: Turf care, weed control, insect and disease control, aeration, seeding, ornamental care and mosquito control.  
**grassrootsturf.com**

## **The Grounds Guys**

Services offered: Residential and commercial services in lawn and grounds maintenance, outdoor lighting, tree and shrub maintenance, landscape design and installation, snow and ice service, artificial turf installation and service, fertilization, power and pressure washing.  
**groundsguys.com**

## **Joshua Tree**

Services offered: Tree service, plant health care, lawn care and pest control.  
**joshuatreeexperts.com**

## **Lawn Doctor**

Services offered: Fertilization, lawn seeding, power seeding, natural lawn care, mosquito and tick control, grub control, weed control, core aeration and commercial lawn services.  
**lawndoctor.com**

## **Lawn Pride**

Services offered: Aeration, fertilization, fungicide, overseeding, pest control and weed control.  
**lawnpride.com**

## **Lawn Squad**

Services offered: Aeration, fertilization, seeding, weed control, grub and insect control for both residential and commercial properties.  
**lawnsquad.com**



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### Lush Lawn

Services offered: Lawn care services, weed control, natural lawn care and grub control.  
**lushlawn.com**

### Manage Mowed

Services offered: Full-service landscape maintenance, enhancements and seasonal services.  
**managemowed.com**

### Monster Tree

Services offered: Tree removal, tree and shrub pruning, plant health care and commercial tree services.  
**monstertreeservice.com**

### The Mosquito Authority

Services offered: Mosquito treatment, tick control, pest control, all-natural solutions and fly control.  
**mosquito-authority.com**

### Mosquito Joe

Services offered: Barrier spray, natural treatments, flea control, tick control, gnat control, misting systems, special event treatments, commercial services, mosquito traps, perimeter pest and smart mosquito repellent system.  
**mosquitojoe.com**

### Mosquito Mike

Services offered: Mosquito control and tick control.  
**mymosquitomike.com**

### MosquitoNix

Services offered: Misting systems, fogging, pest

control and holiday lighting and décor.  
**mosqitonix.com**

### Mosquito Police

Services offered: Mosquito control, tick control and barrier protection.  
**Mosquitopolice.net**

### NaturaLawn

Services offered: Organic lawn care and organic-based maintenance services.  
**naturalawn.com**

### Spring Green

Services offered: Lawn care, pest control and tree care.  
**spring-green.com**

### Spring Touch

Services offered: Lawn care, aeration, mosquito control and organic lawn care.  
**Springtouchlawn.com**

### Superior Mosquito Defense

Services offered: Lawn care, mosquito control and irrigation.  
**Superiormosquito defense.com**

### U.S. Lawns

Services offered: Commercial landscape maintenance, lawn care, irrigation, tree care, hardscape and snow and ice management.  
**USlawns.com**

### Weed Man

Services offered: Lawn care and mosquito services.  
**weedman.com**

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## WEED AVENGERS

SPREADING  
LIKE WILDFIRE

Fireweed can be a major problem for LCOs because of how fast it spreads.



# Quickly extinguish your fireweed problem

Learn why it's important to always be vigilant with fireweed **BY GEORGE KEGODE, PH.D. | CONTRIBUTOR**



**F**ireweed, a rapidly spreading weed, requires annual management by lawn care operators (LCOs). Its emergence in spring poses a threat to lawns, leading to potential takeovers.

Also referred to as American burnweed, this weed started appearing sporadically in lawns and turf areas in the late 1980s, according to Cullen Beard, owner of Personal Lawn Care in Brunswick, Tenn., which offers lawn care services to mostly residential customers.

The outbreaks raised concerns among clients, prompting questions about LCO's programs. This caused considerable distress among many service providers.

"Fireweed germinates in the spring and grows exceptionally fast thereafter," says Aaron Hathaway, technical services manager at Nufarm. "(Fireweed) flourishes in turf that lacks regular mowing, such as lawns in the south that undergo biweekly mowing. It commonly appears in dormant warm-season turf that has not been overseeded."

## CHEMICAL CONTROL

Fireweed can generate and spread seeds that germinate and establish roots in the thatch above the soil. It can persist and thrive through a pre-emergence barrier, even if established before germination, Hathaway says.

In these cases, managing the surviving plants requires an LCO either mow them down or make a postemergent herbicide application.

Additionally, Hathaway says herbicides that contain a PPO inhibitor like carfentrazone or pyraflufen-ethyl can help with burndown.

Another approach is using non-selective herbicide applications in dormant turfgrass, like flumioxazin as a preemergent or glufosinate as a postemergent. Other preemergent herbicide options, including dithiopyr, indaziflam, pendimethalin and prodiamine, may offer some control for fireweed and are commonly used to control other problematic weeds found in turfgrass.

Adding a good surfactant with the broadleaf weed control herbicide will improve postemergent control of fireweed, Hathaway adds.

Beard points out that since fireweed emerges from the thatch layer, preemergent herbicides with good soil activity provide limited control. He emphasizes the challenge of timing herbicide applications correctly for effective control and product selection for preventive measures.

Managing fireweed becomes even more challenging due to the varying infestation levels in different years. In instances where fireweed is detected in turfgrass, postemergent herbicides like 2,4-D, triclopyr plus fluroxypyr, and MCPA plus fluroxypyr plus dicamba offer effective control in warm-season turfgrass cultivars, Hathaway notes.

LCOs relying on preemergent herbicides need to be vigilant, especially considering fireweed's emergence from the thatch layer.

## A DIVERSE APPROACH?

Combining preemergent and postemergent herbicide treatments enhances fireweed control. For instance, products containing 2,4-D plus MCPP plus dicamba demonstrate superior control compared to 2,4-D alone, according to Beard.


Adding metsulfuron methyl to this mixture, along with close mowing every seven to 10 days, results in excellent fireweed control. He recommends a tactical approach for LCOs to reduce outbreaks, such as applying prodiamine within three weeks of fireweed germination.

Also, combining indaziflam with prodiamine in split applications not only enhances fireweed control but also addresses other troublesome turfgrass weeds like goosegrass and doveweed.

## MECHANICAL CONTROL METHODS

Fireweed roots in the thatch layer, making hand pulling or mowing an effective method.

Hathaway says that pulling or popping fireweed plants out of the ground with a tool can be effective unless there are too many plants to control mechanically or the area is too large to cover efficiently.

Ultimately, experts say combining carefully selected preemergent and postemergent herbicide applications with mechanical control methods proves to be the most effective approach to control fireweed and prevent its spread. 

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



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## TIPSHEET

# Keep your trees healthy and bright

According to experts, several factors affect the growth and health of a tree

BY BRIAN LOVE | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

**A**s the summer months approach, trees will once again begin to sport their bright and colorful leaves. To make sure your trees thrive in 2024, it's important to examine your tree care routine starting from the ground up — literally.

"Tree health and longevity begins with matching the plant with the soil. Soil characteristics determine tree selection for each site," Beth Brantley, plant pathologist with Bartlett Tree Experts, says.

Brantley and experts from Arborjet and Davey Tree share what to know to make your soil and trees work in perfect harmony.

## THE RIGHT STUFF

Most trees will grow well in loamy, well-drained neutral pH soils, according to Brantley. However, some species require special soil profiles, making it important to have a good understanding of what kind of tree you're planting.

Some of those special requirements could include soil that is especially

acidic, alkaline-rich or quick-draining. These types of soil will oftentimes need additional treatments to maintain healthy trees.

One example Brantley offers is a pin oak (*quercus palustris*), which requires moist, acidic soil because of its inability to obtain necessary nutrients in low-pH soils.

For most tree species, Kevin Brewer, northeast territory technical manager for Arborjet, recommends a soil mix of 40 percent sand, 40 percent loam and 20 percent silt as it holds good moisture, but not too much.

"If the water drains too fast, you may need to irrigate or rely on rain more often than if you have clay. Water tends to stick around a lot longer and you can have saturated soils longer," he says.

For contractors working in urban environments, Brewer says soils can often lack organic matter. To combat this, he recommends contractors use mulch and humic acids to enhance the soil's ability to retain moisture and nutrients.

## ADD-ONS

To add organic matter, Brantley recommends biochar, a black carbon produced from biomass sources like manure and plant residue. She says biochar helps to improve soil porosity and increase nutrient retention.

Contractors have several options for biochar applications, ranging from large chips to injections, according to Jason Parker, district manager for Davey Tree's north Philadelphia, Pa., office.


"(Biochar) can go down in a large chip when you're amending the soil," Parker says. "It also can be spread like a pelletized material, which is great for turf. It can be injected into the subsurface with a liquid carrier like water. There are a ton of products out there that provide all kinds of different options. (The kind you chose) is going to depend on what kind of program you have for your trees."

Before deciding on a product like biochar, contractors should complete a soil test. Brantley says this is the best way to ensure a tree not only survives but thrives.

## SOLVING THE PROBLEM

If a tree's health starts to decline, Brewer says contractors should keep a close eye on its incremental growth.

For example, he explains that a young oak tree may grow around six inches each year. But if that same tree only grows around one inch each year, it's a sign that something might be wrong in the soil.

"If you see that dramatically slowed growth, something is definitely wrong," Brewer says. "First, you should look at the leaves. If they start to look yellow, you might be lacking in nutrient availability. If you have some wilting, you may have water issues. If there is some dieback on the leaves, you might have high salt in certain areas." 

## LET IT GROW

Experts say a great way to keep track of a tree's health is through its incremental growth.



PHOTO: DAVEY TREE



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## DON'T GET BURNED BY FIRE ANTS THIS SPRING

Fire ants can be annoying and painful pests for LCOs and homeowners alike

BY ROB DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

One of the most iconic insect pests in the U.S., red imported fire ants can be a nightmare for lawn care operators (LCOs).

The fire ant has established itself nationwide, but is particularly an issue in the southeast, according to Bobby Kerr, technical service manager for Quali-Pro.

"These ants will usually have reddish to brown heads and bodies that transition to darker, almost black abdomens," says Kerr. "Another identifying feature, if you choose to examine them closely, will be the two nodes, or bumps, located on their thin waist just before the large abdomen."

### BURN BABY, BURN

While fire ants don't damage turf, their mounds can damage equipment. However, the biggest issue that fire ants present to both LCOs and homeowners is that they can be aggressive if disturbed and pack a painful sting.

If provoked, fire ants swarm and latch onto the skin of their target. After they've stung and been brushed off, the person or animal they stung is left with burning and swelling.

Another issue, Kerr adds, is that ants will make their way into buildings and other structures while foraging for food. This, he says, makes fire ants something that homeowners will likely want taken care of immediately after they've been spotted on their property.

### SPOTTING MOUNDS

Fire ants are easy to spot if you know

what to look for, specifically their unique mounds. Fire ant mounds are large and usually flat, with no visual entrances. In certain situations, undisturbed fire ant mounds can reach up to 18 inches in height—but on a lawn, they will be much smaller.

"Mounds can be found throughout a property," Kerr says. "Most commonly, mounds will be found on areas of the home lawn and ornamental beds. Fire ants thrive in disturbed habitats, including yards, gardens, alongside curbs or sidewalks and in grassy areas."

While also being an eyesore, fire ant mounds can damage a lawn care operator's equipment if they are also providing maintenance.

"The mounds are more of a nuisance when mowing or performing other cultural practices. Mower blades will dull quicker and need more frequent sharpening," Kerr says.

### TREATMENT OPTIONS

Several treatment options exist for LCOs with a fire ant infestation on a property they manage, according to Kerr.

"Granular insecticides, liquid concentrates and bait granules are all important tools for ant management, and the speed and length of control can depend on the product you choose," he says. "If curative action and quick results are needed, especially in places with high foot traffic, a contact insecticide spray product is a good option to consider. Targeting mounds with products that can be used for mound drenching, like bifenthrin, is also an effective approach for fire ant control."




**HARD TO MISS**  
Fire ant mounds, if left undisturbed, can grow to 18-inches in height.

Kerr also recommends broadcast bait applications as an effective option for control. LCOs that choose broadcast bait will spread the granular product across an area for foraging fire ants to find and take it to the colony, where it is shared among nest mates and the queen.

Another potential method is individually treating mounds. This can be an effective strategy for LCOs with just a few mounds on their property, but Kerr adds that these treatments only control the mound where the application is applied and will not affect other mounds in an area.

Application timing is crucial for control—specifically with broadcast bait applications according to Kerr. He recommends that LCOs start to make bait available on a customer's lawn as temperatures start to rise in the spring.

"(This is when) mounds appear, and workers actively forage for food," he says. "Another effective strategy involves bait applications in the fall, as it targets colonies when they are in decline. This approach helps to reduce the population and mounds the following spring." 

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## There's always more to see at the *LM* Growth Summit

**Chris Joyce, president of Always Green of Cape Cod, reflects on his three trips to the *LM* Growth Summit**

BY BRIAN LOVE | *LM* ASSOCIATE EDITOR

A multi-time *LM* Growth Summit Attendee, Chris Joyce, president of Always Green of Cape Cod in Marston Mills, Mass., knows all about what to expect from the three-day event in Orlando, Fla.

Joyce was a member of the *LM* Growth Summit's first class of lawn care operators in 2013. 2023 marked Joyce's third time attending the *LM* Growth Summit, which brings lawn care operators from across the country together to network and learn about the latest products the industry has to offer.

Joyce — a 30-year green industry veteran whose company pro-

vides lawn care, tree and shrub care, aeration and pest control services to more than 2,000 customers in southern Massachusetts — says his favorite part of the event has always been the people.

He adds that meeting new people and testing new products is a sure-fire way to increase your longevity and success in the industry.

"It's always great being able to talk to all different types of partners, vendors, suppliers or other contractors. Being in a very close setting allows you to walk out of there with some great takeaways and some quick knowledge," he says.

Joyce has brought home more than just knowledge and new industry relationships from his Growth Summit experiences. Joyce has formed relationships with several companies — including Albaugh Speciality Products and PBI-Gordon — during his Summit appearances.

At the 2023 event, he found himself on the lookout for a new spreader. Because of the Summit, Joyce was able to meet and speak with the representatives from Stinger Equipment, a company that specializes in turf renovation equipment such as hydrostatic drive aerators and ground-metered spreader sprayers.

**"It's always great being able to talk to all different types of partners, vendors, suppliers or other contractors. Being in a very close setting allows you to walk out of there with some great takeaways and some quick knowledge."**

CHRIS JOYCE



"We were able to look at some interesting new spreaders and ride-on spreaders," Joyce says. "There's a couple of new ones on the market that we really like. When we're ready to get more, we'll definitely be talking to Stinger."

### FEELING RECHARGED

Joyce hopes to make another return trip to the *LM* Growth Summit in the future, saying that it has helped him to learn more about what he needs to successfully run his business.

"It gets you away from your day-to-day," Joyce says. "Everything that you need is right in front of you. You're getting one-on-one conversations with suppliers, vendors and your peers. Even though it's a quick in and out, I think the takeaways are huge. You leave for a couple of days, and you come back recharged." 🔄

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## MAINTENANCE SHOP

**YOU OUGHTA KNOW**  
Experts say there's much to look forward to in the future of stand-on mowers.



PHOTO: EXMARK

# Riding into the horizon

**See what manufacturers say you should know about the next generation of stand-on mowers**

**BY ROB DIFRANCO**  
**LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR**

**C**ompared to their ride-on counterpart, stand-on mowers haven't seen the same level of development over the last several years, according to experts. That said, mower manufacturers have been listening to what the contractor wants and taking notes.

"Landscape contractors are looking for more productivity," Chris Lammie,

director of product marketing for Exmark, says. "How can they cut more grass better and faster without breaking down? We've focused on adding horsepower, deck width, durability and reliability, making them easier to maintain and repair."

Lammie and Gavin Dobson, product specialist at Grasshopper, share what landscape contractors can expect from the industry's newest ride-on mowers and offer a look at what's next.

### BIGGER AND BADDER

According to Lammie, mower manufacturers have had several major areas of focus for improvements to stand-on

zero-turn mowers. That starts with engine horsepower and cutting deck width, as companies aim to cut grass faster than ever before.

"Five years ago, you'd have a 60-inch stand-on that went 10 miles per hour (mph)," he says. "Now we've got a 72-inch that goes 11 mph, so you're cutting six acres an hour instead of five. That's a big jump in productivity and we continue to see that in stand-ons across the board."

*Continued on page 40*

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## MOWING + MAINTENANCE

### MAINTENANCE SHOP

*Continued from page 38*

Even with the move to larger decks, Lammie believes there will still be a space in the market for mowers with smaller profiles. Exmark, he says, just recently relaunched 32- and 36-inch stand-on mowers due to a growing demand for machines that can fit through gates into backyards.



Chris Lammie

#### MORE IMPROVEMENTS

Alongside cutting power and speed, Lammie and Dobson point to several other improvements for stand-on mowers over the last several years, including ease of operation, operator comfort and easier maintenance.

“We work on minimizing the number of grease points so (operators) don’t have to do as much inspection and greasing at the beginning of the day,” Lammie says. “We also aim to get rid or consolidate parts over time so that we can reduce the number of potential failures on the machine.”

#### KEEPING COMFORTABLE

A former landscape professional himself, Dobson has years of firsthand experience with stand-on mowers. During his time on mowers, he’s found that operator comfort features have come a long way.

“10 or 15 years ago, most mowers just had a standard seat or platform,” he says. “But now, you’re seeing suspension seats and platforms. It’s all about making sure the operator isn’t fatigued after an eight-hour mowing day.”

Now, at Grasshopper, Dobson says manufacturers — including his employer — are creating mowers with the operator’s comfort in mind. That starts with the frame, where reducing vibration is a major point of emphasis and moves to the mower’s controls where ergonomic handles take the brunt of the vibrations.

Another area where manufacturers are adding comfortability features according to Dobson is the tower, with some mowers allowing users to adjust it based on their height.

#### ELECTRIC ON THE WAY

Looking to the future, both Dobson and Lammie believe that the next major step for most zero-turn mowers will be electrification.

“You can’t go to a trade show now without seeing a bunch of battery-powered mowers,” Lammie says. “We are still waiting probably for the volume to catch up because it doesn’t make sense yet for everyone. But that’s been a big change in the industry, I would say in the past three, four years in terms of commercial acceptance.”

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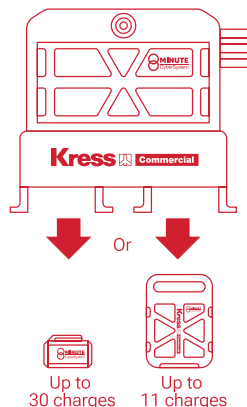
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## MAINTAIN YOUR EDGE

# The times they are a-changin’

## How business owners are handling the potential of gas-powered equipment bans

BY BRIAN LOVE | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

**R**ichey Plemons, owner of Plemons Lawn and Landscape, spends a lot of time thinking about the future of the industry.

“If you’re not prepared, you’re going to be sitting at the station and the train’s going to be two miles away,” Plemons says. “It’ll be gone. You always need to look ahead and see what’s coming at you.”

One specific topic that occupies a lot of real estate in his mind is battery-powered equipment. In Plemons’s neck of the woods — Chatsworth, Ga., — there isn’t currently a ban on gas-powered equipment. But Plemons looks to places like California, New York and New Jersey, which have seen bans on the sale and operation of gas-powered equipment from mowers to blowers, and wonders what’s on the horizon.

Phil Leger, president of Vision Equipment, a distributor based in Montreal, Canada, is already living in that reality, as several boroughs near him have banned gas-powered equipment.

“One township, where the cost of living is quite high, has banned gas-powered equipment altogether when it comes to mowing and blowing and edge trimming,” Leger says.

Because of the looming threat of gas-powered equipment bans, both Plemons and Leger agree that it’s crucial for landscapers to futureproof their equipment lineup now before bans spread further.

### TRYING NEW THINGS

Plemons’ first piece of advice to contractors making the change to battery-powered equipment is to go in with an open mind. Plemons’ operation utilizes smaller, handheld battery-powered equipment for maintenance jobs.

“While battery-powered equipment still may not be as strong as gas-powered equipment in certain areas, they are starting to make advancements,” he says. “Some smaller (battery-powered) hedge trimmers and other handheld tools are just as powerful as their gas-powered counterparts.”

Leger says that a backup plan for contractors begins with getting used to operating battery-powered tools. This includes finding a charging system and implementing things onto the truck.

“Even without (the threat of) bans, I’m a huge battery-powered tool user,” Leger says. “We love it. It’s a better operation experience and can lead to many other health benefits from not having to be around a loud, smoking gas engine.”

Leger says small businesses looking to switch to battery power should slowly implement these new tools.

### A DIFFERENT APPROACH

Futureproofing your business isn’t a one-stop shop. Plemons says the strategy will change depending on the piece of equipment you’re addressing. Certain pieces of equipment, like blowers, burn a lot of energy, meaning contractors will need a larger supply of batteries available.



**FUTUREPROOFING** With bans on gas-powered equipment increasing, now is the time to start thinking about what’s next.

Plemons has his worries that gas-powered equipment bans won’t stop at blowers and hedge trimmers. He again looks to California, where there is a proposed ban on the sale of gasoline cars by 2035.

With that, and an increasing number of battery-powered mowers hitting the market, he explains that contractors should start thinking about the infrastructure that might come with larger battery equipment. This includes finding a charging system and implementing the tools into the truck.

“We know that cost and profit margins are so slim already, but we can’t afford to be crippled for weeks or months if there is an implementation order for battery-powered equipment,” Leger says. “To survive, your business needs to have this kind of backup plan because it’s inevitable and it is coming.”



Phil Leger



## BUSINESS BOOSTERS

**THE MOWERS ARE COMING**  
With more robotic mowing options emerging, navigating the marketplace will continue to become more challenging.



# The do's and don'ts of robotic mower purchases

What do you need to know before deciding on a robotic mower for your business?

BY ROBERT DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

**A**s more and more robotic mowing options hit the market, landscape contractors need to know exactly what they're getting into. Does the mower you're purchasing utilize an in-ground guide or boundary wire? Does it operate off of a GPS signal? Or does it use built-in sensors?

To answer those questions, *LM* talks with Matt Moore, director of robotics sales for Sunseeker.

### DO

#### Know the machine you're buying.

Moore says it's crucial to fully understand the robotic mower you're buying. He adds that robotic mowers aren't just

especially hilly? Does the customer have pets or children that could present obstacles for the mower to maneuver around? When does the customer want the mower to run?

One that contractors can sometimes forget about, Moore says, is whether or not the property has fences and how the mower will need to navigate around or through them.

"If it's a physical fence, there are companies that make gates that allow them to pass through. However, some of them are a little bit unsightly," Moore says. "But also, certain people have really expensive fences and don't want you to cut. So that might change how you approach it. You might do one in the front yard and nothing in the backyard, or vice versa, or you might install two machines."

Invisible dog fences pose a different dilemma for contractors, as that might limit options to exclusively GPS or wireless-capable mowers.

"If you're using a wired system, you'll need to make sure it's compatible and won't interfere with the existing fence," Moore says. "But, if you want to avoid a headache, wireless might be the only option available to you."

### DON'T

#### Forget about parts and maintenance.

While contractors might think robotic mowers are set and forget machines, it's important to remember that they have unique maintenance needs.

"It might be a little bit more cumbersome because a lot of (robotic mowers)

are designed so you have to take the machine almost completely apart to fix something simple," Moore says.

That extra time spent on maintenance is something that robotic mower manufacturers are working on mitigating, Moore adds. He points specifically to wheel motors and blades as pain points that contractors should expect to be addressed in the future.

**Forget to ask questions.** With the increase in robotic mowers on the market, contractors need to be sure they're asking the right questions to understand what each particular model can do. That starts with the simplest question, 'How much can it cut?'

"Is it a half-acre, quarter-acre, an acre?" he says. "Also (ask about) runtime. With newer wireless machines, it's not that big of an issue because systematic mowing reduces it. But if they're selling products or buying products that are wired, (it's important) to understand the timetable and the customer's expectations on how often it runs."

**Be afraid.** "Don't be afraid of it," he says. "There's a lot of hesitancy because people think it's going to eliminate a position or eliminate head count. But that's not the case, you're going to need people to install, work on and understand them. Just keep your mind open. There's a lot of change coming, but at the end of the day, it's just another product to help you focus on more profitable things in your business." 📱



Matt Moore

robotic mowers are designed to be maintainers, you need to make sure that your mowing schedules are correct," he says. "If your customer wants that golf course look, you need to make sure that it has the right amount of time to operate and maintain the turf's height."

**Know the property/properties the machine is working on.** Some of the most important questions a contractor should consider before choosing a robotic mower include: Is the property

## PROS' TOOLBOX

# Making the cut

**Two tree care professionals advise on what they look for when choosing the best pole saw**

BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**T**ree pruning is a serious business. Safety is always the top priority. This is why, when it comes to purchasing the right tools to be effective and safe, price is just a number. Whenever a tree care professional can stay on the ground as opposed to climbing the tree, that's a major bonus.

"If you have a good, sharp head with 23 feet of reach, you can make clearance cuts on the second story of a home without having to climb (the tree)," says Levi Vogt, plant health care route manager, Ryan Lawn & Tree. "It's a common problem throughout the Midwest: too many river birches planted too close to homes. If it's something really heavy, we're doing everything we can from the ground first, before somebody is trying to get set up to climb the tree."

Here's what two tree care professionals told us they prefer when choosing the best pole saws.

### JAY ROTONNELLI

**Vice president, business development  
Piscataqua Landscaping and Tree Service**

"I've been in the industry a long time. This is my 34th year. I've seen a lot of products and new stuff come down the road. But Corona and Felco have always been the two major brands, major players in the industry who have really developed some great products and have really good long-term warranties and replacement parts. So those tend to be our go-to.

The next part of the conversation is we're trying to work towards cordless operation and less gas and be more on the green side. Stihl and Felco seem to have the best setups from what we're gathering. We've demoed and tried them. There's a little bit more investment up-front for the cordless tools. However, I think in the long run, the ROI is much greater. Fewer parts that are going to break, less manpower and knowledge needed to mix the fuel. We still have the gas method, but we're leaning more towards the electric cordless side of things at this point."



Jay Rotonelli



### LEVI VOGT

**Plant Health Care Route Manager  
Ryan Lawn & Tree**

"We use a notch-telescoping saw with a Silky Hayauchi head on it. It's fantastic. It's heavier, but you can get a ton of reach out of it. Those Silky heads are high-quality. They stay sharp for a long time. They've got a hook on the top and a bumper on the bottom, so it's a fantastic style. They're worth the money.

When you're working in pruning, you're hard on your equipment. No matter what you're doing, you can't take care of it as well as you want to, you're still going to be hard on it. These have been proven through all of our pruning crews throughout the company.

Those are manual, but we also have a gas-powered one — the Stihl HT108. We like that one a lot. It's heavy-duty and can go through a couple-inch limbs. But it's also heavier. But if I know I'm going to be making a couple bigger cuts 10, 12 feet off the ground, I'll use that one."



Levi Vogt



## HARDSCAPE SOLUTIONS

# The 19th hole

BY BRIAN LOVE | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

**LOCATION** Dublin, Ohio

**COMPANY** Landscapes by Terra

**DETAILS** Before starting work on this project, this property sat dormant for more than 10 years, says Jeff Stroupe, owner of Landscapes by Terra.

The property featured a 5,200 square-foot driveway fitted with 30-year-old pavers, a 170-foot-long dry creek bed, deteriorating hardscapes and dying plants all around.

To address these challenges, Landscapes by Terra proposed reducing landscape beds in favor of more green space.

The client wanted to reuse the existing pavers, which caused extra work for crews as they needed to clean the dry concrete off and inspect each paver by hand before reinstalling them.

Before crews reinstalled the driveway pavers, they dug a foot down to remove the previous base and start over. The new base and materials installed in the driveway allow excess water to flow directly into the dry creek bed.

There was added pressure on this project because the property can be seen on television during the Memorial Tournament, a PGA Tour event held at nearby Muirfield Village Golf Club.

“The most advantageous view of that property from the golf course is the tee box on hole 18,” Stroupe says. “(The cameras) shoot directly on the south side of this house. So, we put a lot of hardscapes over there.” 📺

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



**Captions** | **1.** One major client request was to reduce the square footage of garden beds, allowing for more green spaces where their children could play. **2.** The homeowner spent several years incrementally replacing the deteriorating hardscapes and plants throughout the property before bringing in Landscapes by Terra. The contractor then rendered a master plan and got to work. **3.** The property slopes towards the front of the home, creating flooding issues. To overcome that challenge, Landscapes by Terra strategically directed water away from the home toward a large dry creek bed. **4.** One of four patio areas on the property, the contractor utilized Holland Premier pavers from Unilock to replace the previous pavers that are now used in the front driveway.



## PRODUCTS THAT WORK



### TSA 300 CUTQUIK

**COMPANY:** Stihl

**URL:** [StihlUSA.com](https://www.stihlusa.com)

The TSA 300 from Stihl can cut through a 4-inch concrete slab. The saw is equipped with a commercial-grade high-torque brushless motor and a magnetic filter that helps protect the motor from the influence of fine metal dust particles. With an IPX4 rating, contractors can use the saw in wet conditions. Additionally, the quick-connect water hose adapter is designed to prevent water from spraying on the user when the pressurized water hose is disconnected.



### M18 FUEL CUT-OFF SAW

**COMPANY:** Milwaukee Tool

**URL:** [MilwaukeeTool.com](https://www.milwaukeetool.com)

The M18 FUEL 9-inch cut-off saw runs on Milwaukee's M18 RedLithium batteries, meaning it produces no gas fumes. The cut-off saw can cut reinforced concrete as well as a large variety of other metal and masonry materials. It also starts up instantly, eliminating the need to mix gas and oil. The saw also has One-Key integration, allowing contractors to wirelessly connect the tool with their smartphone to track and manage it.



### CSG-7410

**COMPANY:** Echo

**URL:** [Echo-USA.com](https://www.echo-usa.com)

The CSG-7410 cut-off saw features a high drive ratio for improved cutting through thick masonry blocks and dense concrete. It includes a four-stage air filtration system and a quick-release hose adapter. The saw also features a high-torque drive system, an easy-starting system with a reduced-effort starter and decompression valve, a reversible cutting head and a 73.5 cc two-stroke engine.







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The right nozzle can not only make irrigation more efficient, it can help save technicians time while on the job.

## What's the **No. 1** thing irrigation contractors should look for in a **good nozzle**?

### **DJ SEEGER** SEEGER WATER PRESIDENT

I am a big believer that simplicity is key when it comes to nozzles. There are a lot of nozzles out there and that offers a lot of questions about 'When am I supposed to use this one over that one?' It's important to keep it simple. For us, keeping it simple starts with adjustable nozzles so technicians don't have to carry around a bunch of different nozzles. They have one 12-foot nozzle and that can be a 360 or a tiny little stream for one little corner. So for us, what makes a nozzle great is the simplicity and not having to carry so many nozzles with you.



### **PAUL SCHULTZ** CAGWIN & DORWAND IRRIGATION RESOURCE MANAGER

First off, consider if the nozzle is going on a pop-up spray head or a rotor, as that might change what you're looking for. In the case of a pop-up spray head, a good nozzle should have the ability to be adjusted when you need to change the pattern. It should have a clean pattern that makes your irrigation operation more efficient. What you don't want to have is something that can get easily clogged. (A good nozzle) should be easy for a technician to adjust. At the end of the day, what you want to have is even coverage, that's what the nozzle is there for.





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# FIVE QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW BY SETH JONES | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

## Jeff Margulies

**OWNER**

**GOOD EARTH LANDSCAPING & MAINTENANCE  
CARBONDALE, COLO.**

### 1 What should our readers know about Good Earth Landscaping & Maintenance?

Good Earth Landscaping is based in Carbondale, Colo., just outside of Aspen. We serve the entire Roaring Fork Valley — Aspen, Snowmass, Basalt, Carbondale, Glenwood Springs — and do some work outside of the Valley on a case-by-case basis. We are a full-service company and do landscape maintenance, irrigation, construction/installation, fine gardening and garden design and snow removal.

### 2 You have a unique background. What did you do before joining Good Earth?

I hadn't landscaped until I was running Good Earth. I was in the corporate world previously, primarily in finance and corporate development. This was my first foray into the green industry. Originally, I was advising Good Earth on the finance side. My now business partner, Josh Austin, had purchased the company to establish a portfolio of local service businesses and there was a need for someone to manage and grow Good Earth. I had seen a lot of different businesses in different industries and mostly wanted to continue to live where we did, so it seemed like a unique opportunity to become an operator and learn a new industry.

### 3 Generally speaking, how was business last year?

It was great, in terms of growth and investment in the business. There was a lot of change for us, especially based on things we learned in our ACE peer group. We implemented new processes, software and accountability practices. It was a challenge going through a lot of structural change while growing and executing on the business in front of us, but I think it set us up really well for the future.

### 4 Do you have a family? What do you all do for fun?

My wife, Charlotte, is a therapist in Aspen. She's very inspiring in terms of her patience and her understanding of people and is a good advisor on the business side as well. I tend to be very numbers-focused and she does a great job of helping me be mindful in how I communicate my expectations — especially when I feel like they aren't being met. We have two little girls, we have a 3-and-a-half-year-old and a 15-month-old. We love to go up into the mountains to ski, bike, fish and just enjoy being outside. Both our girls are skiers. Carson is in her third season this year and Brooks is just getting on skis as well.

### 5 What is the best thing about having your job?

The work that we do is all around us and it has an impact on our lives. There are public spaces that we maintain and also use. It's also a unique place to live in terms of the wealth disparity and some of the housing challenges. To be a business that supports the community and helps people build sustainable life in a place that they love has been really gratifying. Building relationships with our employees, families and kids has been really special. 🌱

PHOTO: CHRIS RUPINSKI



#### BEST ADVICE

**"My wisest business advisor is my mom. She has run some pretty large organizations and has been a big implementer of change. One thing she has always stressed to me is to take time to observe and, most importantly, listen before you come in and start making big changes."**



# FINDING THE RIGHT PARTNERS FOR GROWTH

## How the acquisition market helped Tree Amigos expand and create opportunities

BY LAUREN DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR

Over the past several years, Florida-based Tree Amigos Outdoor Services has experienced growth in all facets. The company, which ranked No. 143 on the 2023 *LM150* list, has been on both sides of the acquisition game over the last two years, acquiring companies in 2022 before joining Ruppert Landscape at the end of last year.

The company's goal has been to find companies that align with its vision and values to help it grow and create more opportunities for its team members, says Jim Proctor, owner of Tree Amigos and now regional vice president of Ruppert Landscape.

Tree Amigos has three branches servicing Jacksonville, St. Augustine, Fleming Island and Orlando, Fla. It provides commercial landscape maintenance, design/build, irrigation, lawn care and pest control services.

Tree Amigos experienced a 151-percent change in revenue from 2021 to 2022, landing it on the *LM150* list of the top landscaping companies in the country. One way it did that was by expanding into the Orlando market in 2022 with the acquisition of Green Orchid Landscape.

"We saw this as an opportunity to partner with a great team in an adjacent market, allowing us to extend our operations seamlessly and serve clients from Northern Florida to Central Florida," Proctor says.

Prioritizing a positive and engaged workplace culture to retain team members has been another important component of his company's success, he adds.

"We equip our team members with the information and skills they need to perform work that is horticulturally sound, safety-focused and delivers consistent high-quality results for our customers," Proctor says. "Accountability and empowerment were key areas of focus for us in the past few years. We worked with our exceptional front-line team to encourage personal responsibility, creative problem-solving and efficient decision-making for our customers."

The double-digit growth Tree Amigos experienced from



Tree Amigos owner Jim Proctor attributes his company's double-digit growth in 2022 to new company and account acquisitions and a partnership with Ruppert Landscape in 2023.

2021 to 2022 was also a result of new account acquisitions, enhancement sales and a focus on existing customers.

The next phase of the company's progress was its partnership with Ruppert Landscape. Proctor says the company was looking for a strategic partner to help accelerate its growth objectives and found that in Ruppert. Tree Amigos bring Ruppert's branch count totals to more than 40.

"Our partnership with Ruppert Landscape was a strategic decision fueled by our desire to accelerate our growth, enhance our service offerings for our customers and provide more opportunities for our team members," he adds.

Looking ahead, Proctor says being a new member of the Ruppert family will play a big role in Tree Amigos' continued success.

"Ruppert is well known in the industry for providing opportunities for team members to learn and grow," he says. "We are looking forward to having access to their systems, tools and training programs."

Proctor says Ruppert's processes and systems will also help his team enhance customer satisfaction and employee productivity to drive growth.

"I'm confident we've chosen a partner who is aligned with our values, focused on our employees, and committed to our continued involvement in the business," he says.



Jim Proctor

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.

Applications are open for the 2024 *LM150* list. Fill out the form at [LandscapeManagement.net](https://LandscapeManagement.net) to submit your information, or email Special Projects Editor Marisa Palmieri [mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net](mailto:mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net) for more information.



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](mailto:greg.herring@herring-group.com).

# Take advantage of opportunities created by private equity competitors

It's no secret that I'm bullish about owner-operated businesses. At the Herring Group, we have a passion for serving them and helping them find success.

Private equity (PE) investors also are not shy about seeing opportunities in owner-operated businesses. PE firms have entered the landscape industry and created a lot of liquidity for owners, providing an opportunity to cash out and exit in some cases.

PE investors bring the following to owner-operated companies:

- Money;
- Smart people;
- An "outsider's" perspective;
- A high-growth mindset;
- An understanding of how to grow and develop businesses; and
- A three-to-five-year focus in most cases.

At the same time, there are many potential advantages to remaining an owner-operated company, including consistency in relationships, consistency in branding and a long-term focus.

Ewing Outdoor Supply, a fourth-generation family-owned distributor operating in 30 states, understands what it is like to compete with PE-backed competitors and even a public company. Ewing CEO and Chairman Doug York recently joined me on a webinar to share his insights about running a 102-year-old company and going up against well-capitalized players.

## DEVELOPING EMPLOYEES

The leaders at Ewing learned long ago that developing employees and treating them well ultimately leads to success with customers. The com-

pany created a learning management system for employees before it was a popular concept, and it continues to evolve its training program, which features multiple career tracks.

Ewing did away with tenure-only raises, instead tying compensation increases to progress in the training program. York estimates that Ewing spends 25 to 30 percent more on training than other distributors.

"Honestly, that's why we're not fearful or not overwhelmed about private equity (competition)," he says. "There's no timeline. It's an ongoing evolution."

“(Private equity) firms have entered the landscape industry and created a lot of liquidity for owners, proving an opportunity to cash out in some cases.”

## FOCUSING ON CUSTOMERS

York advises landscape companies to avoid being intimidated by the size of a competitor or its access to capital. Instead, tune in to your customers' needs locally and execute well.

"We need to do what's right by the local market and take care of our customers, and the rest of the business will take care of itself," he says. "I honestly think (the landscape business) is hard to do from a private equity standpoint, because it's very much an art. Planting a tree, planting a plant (and) getting it to grow is not something you can do in a spreadsheet."

## SUCCESSION PLANNING

One thing PE-backed companies are contemplating — and you should be too — is succession.

"(You) need to start thinking about, 'How can I create an environment for someone to take my place?'" York says.

About 20 years ago, as he began to take the reins from his father, Ray York, Doug focused on building teams at the branch level and giving them autonomy to make decisions within a well-established framework.

Part of the framework is Ewing's robust mission statement, which has remained remarkably consistent for 30 years. It has eight bullet points, the first of which outlines the company's values: honesty, courage, loyalty, integrity, tolerance, responsibility, quality work, perseverance, self-discipline and faith.

It goes on to explain Ewing's target market and ways of doing business in clear, simple terms for the whole team.

"Every time we think we need to change it or update it we go back and look at it and say, 'Hmm, that's pretty spot on.'"

## MY THOUGHTS

Speaking with Doug on the webinar reminded me of the high-performing landscape company owners I work with. The common denominator among them is a winning mindset.

As Ewing embarks on its second century in business, it's hard to ignore the company's optimistic nature and focus on creating win-win-win situations for employees, customers and the company. 🍷





BY JEFF KORHAN

The author is the owner of True Nature Marketing, a Naples, Fla.-based company helping entrepreneurs grow. Reach him at [jeff@truenature.com](mailto:jeff@truenature.com).

# One strategy question your business needs to know

It's that time of the year when strategic plans are tested. Now that peak season is on the horizon, team members may be losing faith. This is a problem when you need everyone fully committed to a unified strategy.

Most strategies fail for a couple of reasons:

- They aren't strategies at all but are instead tactics or plans with no strategic basis. For example, increasing sales calls to boost revenue is merely a tactic based on hope.
- The success criteria or conditions have not been identified. How can you hit a new target when you don't know how to get there?

A strategy assesses market conditions to shape a plan for creating a future reality, one that you believe gives your business an advantage. Your competitors may be able to copy it, but you will reap the rewards of being first.

## HOW TO DETERMINE YOUR STRATEGY

Begin your strategy process by assessing variables such as customers,



**“This is the time to encourage the naysayers on your team to voice their concerns. Once you are confident everyone has bought in, you can move on to planning your strategy's implementation.”**

competitors, and your company's position within that mix. Then, imagine the possibilities that would give your company an edge and quantify that advantage.

Now consider the one most important question of all: *What would have to be true?*

Ask what would have to be true to determine the necessary conditions for your strategy to work. Here are some possibilities:

- 1 Awareness:** Buyers must know who we are.
- 2 Value proposition:** They must understand the benefits of our offer.
- 3 Incentive:** They must need or want the new service.
- 4 Investment:** They must know how much it costs.

The conditions — and there will likely be more — will either prove or disprove your strategy. They will serve you well in the future too, such as when your website is updated and the question of whether to include pricing is raised.

This is the time to encourage the naysayers on your team to voice their concerns. Once you are confident everyone has bought in, you can move on to planning your strategy's implementation.

To be clear, strategy comes before planning and implementation. I suggest erasing “strategic planning” from your vocabulary

because strategy, planning and implementation are distinct activities.

## A REAL-LIFE HYPOTHETICAL CASE STUDY

Regular readers of *Landscape Management* are familiar with Mariani Premier Group. While I have no inside information about how this organization was formed, I have no doubt it followed a strategic process of imagining the possibilities.

Let's hypothetically assume Mariani Landscaping was considering how to grow or accelerate its track record of growth. The possibility of growing through acquisitions must have been considered.

I imagine that discussion could have raised these possibilities.

- Have residential mergers ever been done in this industry?
  - ▶ Maybe a few companies, but not at scale.
- What if it's not a roll-up or merger, what could that look like?
  - ▶ The member companies operate independently.
- How would that dilute or amplify our brand?
  - ▶ We share our systems and learn from our members.

The one thing we know about strategy is that, like marketing, it's never done. Mariani Premier Group is likely the product of years of study and iteration. Your company may be working at a smaller scale, but your strategy deserves equal attention.

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[ AN EYE ON SAFETY ]

### Safety Watch

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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](mailto:marty@growgroupinc.com).



## Sell more to your existing clients

In March, I did a training session with our salespeople at Grunder Landscaping Co. where we went over how enhancements can help us hit our sales goals and what they can do to find more enhancements.

Here's what I shared with them:

If you assume there are 50 weeks in the year to sell — taking two weeks out for the end of the year, when we know it's rare to close sales — we can pretty easily find another \$250,000 in revenue by selling \$5,000 in enhancement work each week.

That's a doable goal and breaking it down into a weekly goal helps us to wrap our brains around it.

The activities needed to sell enhancements require salespeople to go out and be order makers. This means they have to be out in the community, walking the properties they manage and actively looking for ways to create work.



“In sales, sometimes the orders come to us and we can be order takers. Other times, the orders are slow and we need to go out and create demand and make them.”

Here's what I encourage them to look for:

**1 Safety issues.** Is there anything unsafe on the property? Trip hazards? Low-hanging branches?

**2 Bare spots.** Are there bare spots in the mulch where we could add additional plants to fill it in? Less mulch and more plants is a tip I learned from my friend, landscape architect and industry giant, Doug Hoerr.

**3 Usage improvements.** Could we do something to improve the functionality of the property for the way that it's used? We've had success selling retaining walls when they give a client more usable yard space.

**4 Aging or damaged plants.** Are there plants that are damaged or deformed from the winter we could replace? Is there a tree or shrub that's nearing the end of its typical lifespan?

### BE AN ORDER MAKER

I emphasized to my team, and I'll emphasize to all of you, that in no way do I want them to have commission breath or sell our clients work they don't need. We don't need to be overly pushy. Often, just making suggestions about what's possible is enough to find additional work.

Our clients choose to work with us because they know we are experts in outdoor spaces. They want us to bring them ideas on what could be done on their properties. Often, our clients are grateful we brought things to their attention and love the improvements we suggest.

In sales, sometimes the orders come to us and we can be order takers — writing down what the client wants and then doing the work. Other times, the orders are slow, and we need to go out and create demand and make them.

In past years, salespeople could just be order takers and hit their goals. That's increasingly unlikely this year. I hope that these tips help you go out and be an order maker this year.

If you're looking for additional help with sales this year, either for you or your team, I encourage you to join us in May for our Virtual Sales Bootcamp 2.0. This event is a companion to our original Virtual Sales Bootcamp (although they don't need to be taken in order) and will cover information sales teams need to know to close more sales in 2024 in six live online sessions.

Learn more and register at [growgroupinc.com/virtual-sales-bootcamp-2.0](https://growgroupinc.com/virtual-sales-bootcamp-2.0).



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