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[BRING ON LOUISVILLE]

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## A crash course on industry tech

**P**erceptions don't always match realities.

Most of you probably read that sentence and thought, "Wow ... really? Thanks for the breaking news, Capt. Obvious." And most of you would probably be right; as a general rule, our perceptions about people, places and things rarely come close to matching the realities that we discover about them.

But regardless of how obvious that statement is, I did think about it several times as we were working on this issue of *LM*, which puts a spotlight on technological advances in the compact equipment used in the landscaping industry. In particular, I thought about it when I saw the confused looks and blank stares from friends and families after they learned what I was working on, folks who were obviously struggling to reconcile their perceptions of the tools used by landscaping companies and lawn care operators and the cutting-edge, high-tech realities in the industry.

I didn't really blame them, I guess. Among the uninitiated, I'm sure they see this industry as one built on push mowers, shovels and wheelbarrows, manual labor and little else. It's a perception I encountered regularly during my time in the golf course maintenance industry (I promise I'll stop referring to my old job at some point here; I figure I have a six- or seven-month grace period) and I don't think it's a stretch to say it applies in landscaping as well.

The reality, though, is quite the opposite, even if hand tools and hard work are part and parcel of any successful

**“Just tell a nonbeliever about the systems that guide modern landscaping equipment ... and the myriad software solutions used to manage staff, equipment fleets, irrigation systems and more, and you'll see the light bulb go off.”**

operation. Just tell a nonbeliever about the systems that guide modern landscaping equipment, the ongoing embrace of alternative power sources to move those machines and the myriad software solutions used to manage staff, equipment fleets, irrigation systems and more, and you'll see the light bulb go off.


I can't say I was in a similar situation when I began my journey in this industry. I had my own "aha!" moment when I first entered the golf business years ago (again, sorry), so I had a decent understanding of just how advanced landscaping has become and the level of comfort that most operators have with that technology.

That doesn't mean you can't teach an old dog a few new tricks, though, and I picked up some of those in talking with product experts at the manufacturers of compact equipment and some of the end-users who put those machines through their paces. I mean, who knew that some mini excavators

come with remote control options, or that the GPS telemetry systems on a skid steer loader can be used to track and protect those machines from theft? Well, most of you reading this probably did, but still.

My crash course into the landscape industries' increasing embracing of technology to boost efficiency, cost-effectiveness and solve labor challenges didn't end there. Not long after wrapping up this month's cover story, *LM* got an exclusive, up-close-and-personal look at a company dedicated to bringing electric autonomous mowing solutions to landscapers and lawn care operators.

It was a fascinating visit that showcased not only a high level of product innovation, but also a high level of innovative thinking driven by a desire to both solve problems landscape companies face every day and to help those same companies operate as sustainably as possible. In upcoming issues, we'll tell you much more about this company and the host of others who are bringing these autonomous solutions to the market, so stay tuned.

Perceptions often lead to assumptions, and I think most of our parents told us what happens when you make assumptions. That's why I hope this issue of *LM* helps just a little bit to replace those perceptions with the realities of the advances the industry has made and how that technology is helping you do your jobs better, faster and more efficiently. 



# equip

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## Has your business implemented artificial intelligence into your day-to-day operations?

“I don’t know enough about it yet. I’ve been reading up on it, but I’m not comfortable enough with it yet to use it in my business.”



“Yes absolutely. We are finding more and more ways — as a letter writer, research tool, Powerpoint creator and so much more. Every month there are more tools to use.”



“We’re new to this, and like all things new, I think it’s always worth investigating. We’re using it internally for estimating and bidding work. We have team members who use it for personal organization and writing, but we haven’t used it to automate workflows or anything like that yet.”

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### MORE ONLINE

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



**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 Raleigh sunset** (Left to right) McGavock Edwards, VP, E&V Strategic Communications, met the **LM** crew — Seth Jones, editorial director; Craig MacGregor, associate publisher and Bill Roddy, group publisher — for dinner and a nice view of the city.

**2 Robotic revolution** **LM** spent a day with the team at Scythe Robotics learning about their autonomous mowers and how end-users are embracing the tech. From left to right are Jake Goodman, **LM**; Billy Otteman, Scythe's senior director of brand; Allison McIntosh, Scythe brand specialist; Jack Morrison, Scythe co-founder and CEO; **LM** Editor-in-Chief Scott Hollister; and Bryan Waltz, Scythe's senior manager, production and field operations.

**3 Dead Mule Club** While in Chapel Hill, N.C., Craig, Bill and Seth were joined by Mark LaFleur, communications lead, turf and landscapes, Syngenta, at the Dead Mule Club, which has been "kickin'" in Carolina since 1994.

**4 Colorado connection** Hollister (right) paid a visit to Designsapes Colorado — No. 79 on the 2024 **LM**150 list — and their CEO, Phil Steinhuaer, during a recent visit to Denver.

**5 Back in the lab again** Reuel Heyden, U.S. marketing manager — turf and ornamental, Nufarm, (far right) gave the **LM** team a tour of the labs at the company's Morrisville, N.C. facility.

**6 Room with a view** At Envu's HQ in Cary, N.C., Julie Groce, senior marketing communications manager and Mark Ford, customer marketing manager, told the **LM** crew about big plans the company has forthcoming.

**7 Sipcam Agro is growing** Sipcam Agro CEO and COO Brent Marek and Elizabeth Taras, communications specialist, show the guys a photo of the new production plant in Mississippi the company recently purchased.



## LM education sessions return to Equip Expo in 2024




For the third consecutive year, the Outdoor Power Equipment Institute (OPEI) and *Landscape Management* will partner to provide top-notch educational opportunities at Equip Exposition, set for Oct. 15-18 at the Kentucky Exposition Center in Louisville, Ky.

A total of 15 sessions will be available to Equip Expo 2024 attendees, with topics ranging from business management and staff development to conquering labor challenges and equipment advances.

"Equip listens to attendees and provides the most diverse education opportunities for landscape contrac-

tors in the industry, and our partnership with *Landscape Management* illustrates that," said Kris Kiser, president of OPEI and Equip Exposition. "They have a great lineup planned for this year's show, bringing in experts on key trends — employee retention, mergers and acquisitions, branding and new technologies. With so much opportunity to learn in Louisville, we encourage contractors to bring their leadership team so they can take full advantage of what's available."

Only registered attendees for the show are eligible to take part in Equip Expo education. A complete list of *LM*'s classes at Equip Exposition is on the following page. 

### REGISTRATION OPEN FOR NALP'S ELEVATE

The National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP) opened registration for its annual conference and expo, Elevate. The event will take place Nov. 3-6 in Charlotte, N.C.

Elevate provides a platform for industry leaders, innovators and up-and-coming professionals to share knowledge and network. This year's event features educational sessions with keynote speakers, including AI innovator Noelle Russell, best-selling author Shawn Achor, and ESPN reporter and mental health advocate Lauren Sisler. Additionally, attendees will also be able to explore the latest technology and equipment at the show.

One of the highlights of this year's conference is the debut of the NALP Women's Forum, a pre-conference event designed to connect and inspire women in the landscape industry.

"We are thrilled to bring Elevate to Charlotte and to debut the NALP Women's Forum this year," said Britt Wood, CEO of NALP. "Elevate is more than a conference; it's a community where landscape professionals come together to learn, grow and inspire one another."

Registration for Elevate is now open. Companies bringing 10 or more attendees receive 10 percent off the lowest registration rates.



## 2024 EDUCATIONAL SESSIONS

### WEDNESDAY, OCT. 16

**Gamify Your Company Culture: Competition Creates Engagement, noon-1 p.m.:** Presented by Chris Psencik and John Dalton, McFarlin Stanford.

**Building an Accountable Organization, 1-2:30 p.m.:** Presented by Jeffrey Scott.

**Facility Must-Haves: What are the Best Companies Doing When Designing Their Facility?, 2:30-3:30 p.m.:** Presented by Tommy Cole and Chris Psencik, McFarlin Stanford.

**Your Company, Your Culture, 3:30-4:30 p.m.:** Panelists include Larry Ryan of Ryan Lawn & Tree, Taylor Milliken, owner of Milosi Inc. and Chris Psencik, partner and vice president of McFarlin Stanford. Moderated by Seth Jones.

### THURSDAY, OCT. 17

**Hello, it's Private Equity Calling ... How Do You Answer?, 9:30-10:30 a.m.**

**Leveraging a Strong Brand to Attract and Retain Employees and Customers, 10:30-11:30 a.m.**

**Talking Tech, 2030 and Beyond, 11:30 a.m.-12:30 p.m.**

**Start Clean, Finish Clean, 12:30-2 p.m.**

**How to Hire the Best Landscape Employees, 2-3 p.m.**

**Turning Good Ideas into Great Realities, 2:30-3:30 p.m.:** Presented by Judy Guido.

**A Roadmap for Visionary Landscape Business Owners, 3:30-5 p.m.:** Presented by Jeffrey Scott.

**Grow Your All-Star Team from Within: Recruit, Retain and Reward, 4-5 p.m.**

### FRIDAY, OCT. 18

**Keying in on Key Performance Indicators, 10-11:30 a.m.:** Presented by Ken Thomas and Ben Gandy.

**An Electric Personality: The Growing Movement of Electric Equipment, noon-1 p.m.**

**This is Goodbye: Five Things to Know About Selling Your Business, 12:30-1:30 p.m.**


## Harrell's partners with Spraye



The Ask a Fertilizer Expert feature allows Spraye users to get answers to their agronomic questions directly from Harrell's team of agronomists.

Harrell's, a distributor of agronomic solutions, formed a strategic partnership with Spraye, a software solution tailored specifically for lawn treatment businesses.

Spraye, founded in 2018 by Brian and Caitlin Schlichting, offers a comprehensive suite of features, including chemical tracking and compliance, invoicing, scheduling, payment processing, customer communication and inventory management. Additionally, users can engage with the platform's Ask a Fertilizer Expert feature, which offers Spraye users unlimited access to Harrell's network of agronomic consultants.

"Harrell's is proud to align with Spraye. A core value at Harrell's is investing in people and helping them be successful. This collaborative effort aligns with that belief," said Clay Breazeale, Harrell's vice president of Turf South. 

### HNA AWARD APPLICATIONS NOW OPEN

Entries for the 2024 Hardscape North America (HNA) Awards are now open.

The annual awards program honors residential and commercial hardscape projects across nine categories. Entries feature hardscaping designs for walkways, patios, pool decks, outdoor living kitchens and living spaces, and driveways as well as commercial plazas and streets.

Eligible projects for the 2024 HNA Awards include both residential and commercial projects across various categories, with new categories introduced this year.

To qualify for the 2024 HNA Awards, all entries (excluding the vintage installation category) must have been completed between July 1, 2021 and June 30, 2024. Projects are assessed based on design excellence, craftsmanship, construction and compatibility. The entry deadline is Aug. 23.

Award winners will be recognized during the Hardscape North America trade show, Oct. 16-18 in Louisville, Ky.



# GOOD THINGS COME

Compact equipment has made a big impact in the landscape industry, and the best still may be yet to come

BY SCOTT HOLLISTER  
LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**T**he use of compact equipment in the landscape industry has become so ubiquitous that it's easy to convince yourself that these crucial tools have been around forever.

But perceptions don't always match realities, and that's certainly the case when it comes to the fleets of skid-steers, track loaders, mini excavators and the like that are commonplace on many job sites.

*Continued on page 12*



PHOTO: TAKEUCHI



# IN SMALL PACKAGES

## STEADY RISE

Those who have been in the industry for 20-plus years recognize how far compact equipment has come.





*Continued from page 10*

The first pieces of compact equipment — born from their relatives in the heavy equipment world — didn't come into being until the middle of the 20th century, and those debuts were almost exclusively outside of North America. It wasn't until the late 1950s that these smaller, more maneuverable machines began to appear stateside, with customers in industries such as agriculture and mining first in line to put them through their paces; landscape operators would get in on the fun later.

"I remember using some of the older Bobcat machines with the foot pedals when I first started out. I don't think they make them any more ... but I thought they were pretty nice at the time," says Greg Kuykendall, the design/build manager with Seiler's Landscaping in Cincinnati, Ohio, where he's worked for nearly 25 years. "They made a lot of the stuff we used to do by hand much easier, so we appreciated that."

Fast forward to today, and those early, bare-bones pieces of equipment are mainly a distant memory. Most major manufacturers now offer full, feature-laden product lines, and many landscape companies — especially those with significant design/build workloads — have fleets of their own that they use in a variety of applications, proof of compact equipment's popularity and the staying power of the flexibility and versatility they can offer.

And when you talk to product experts from all corners of the industry, they almost universally will tell you the best is yet to come in the compact equipment sector. Whether it's improved options for alternative power sources, GPS integration, increased remote control choices or the possible integration of autonomous technology, it's clear the compact equipment space has never offered more to end-users in the landscape industry.

"We're obviously always open to anything that makes our jobs easier

## DIG THIS

Caterpillar invested two years of research and development into their Next-Gen mini excavator line.



and makes the work more efficient,” says Kuykendall. “Any kind of new technology, new attachments, lighter and more maneuverable machines ... that kind of stuff is always going to be attractive.”



Greg Kuykendall

### ORIGIN STORY

It's probably not much of a surprise that the early iterations of compact equipment—many of which remain in use in landscaping today—were simply smaller, sometimes more basic versions of their ancestors in the heavy equipment sector. Mini excavators, for example, mainly dug holes and trenches. Skid-steers mainly hauled materials.

And truth be told, early advances that eventually became staples in heavy equipment didn't always trickle down into compact equipment. “The question became whether it was cost-effective and scalable,” says Greg Worley, global marketing professional in Caterpillar's mini excavator division. “What made sense for larger construction equipment and what customers were looking for there didn't always make sense for smaller pieces of equipment and those customers.”

That eventually changed, though, mainly because of the natural evolution of the product category and its broader acceptance among end-users.

“The need for technological advances tends to bleed into all (green industry segments) because we—suppliers and manufacturers—are all trying to help alleviate the pain points landscape contractors are experiencing,” says Lee Padgett, a product manager for Takeuchi.

Now the compact equipment sector offers many of the same features and improvements as those found in the heavy equipment that inspired them. A rich menu of attachment options that can assist with a wide variety of design/build tasks are available for skid-steers and mini excavators alike. All feature a full slate of safety options such as rearview cameras. There are numerous options focused on the ease of operation and the comfort of the operator, including features like improved control options and air-conditioned cabs.

“Like a lot of companies, we started off with a good base machine, a good framework to start with, and then have been able to add on and to adjust the machine and really engineer it more for a North American customer and tailor it to their needs,” says Justin Moe, a product manager with Kioti.

### HELPING HAND

End-users like landscape contractors can take much of the credit for many of the advances that have found homes in the compact equipment space. Every manufacturer

*Continued on page 14*

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— Greg Worley, Caterpillar

*Continued from page 13*

*Landscape Management* contacted for this story made a point to emphasize the key role that feedback from customers has played and will continue to play in product development.

As Caterpillar’s Worley put it, “Our marketing tagline is, ‘Inspired by you.’ But for us, that’s a true statement. We want to design and build products that the customer actually wants. You can’t do that if you don’t ask them.”

That mindset was particularly notable in the development of the Cat Next-Gen line of mini excavators — the 301.5 and 301.7 CR and the larger 303.5 CR, 305 CR and 307 CR — Worley notes.

“(With that line), we spent two years traveling the world, talking to customers, talking to dealers, anybody who’s ever ... had an opinion about a mini excavator, whether it be an end-user customer or a dealer,” he says. “We asked them ... if it all cost the same, why would they buy what they’d buy? What would it do? And

if it was a competitive machine — and we went to as many competitors as we went to Caterpillar customers — what does it do differently or better than our machine or what do you need it to do that it doesn’t do today?”

“We did two years of market research before we went to our engineers and said, ‘OK, this is the voice of the customer. This is the voice of the dealer. This is what you need to design and build.’”

A similar approach was central to Kioti’s relatively recent move into the world of compact equipment. The company has been a fixture in North America for more than three decades with an extensive lineup of tractors, utility vehicles and zero-turn mowers, but its compact loaders



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have only been on the market since the end of 2023.

In preparation for that launch and in the years that follow, Moe says input from customers — and prospective customers — played a key role in developing a baseline for those loaders and how they've been enhanced ever since.

"We spent a lot of time talking to our dealers, talking to landscapers and people in ag to see how they actually use these machines on a daily basis," he says. "We wanted to know if that aligned with our expectations of how they'd use the machines or if they were using them in a different way from what we expected. From there, we've been able to readjust, go back and reengineer things to make sure what we were delivering was meeting needs."

First Green Industries is a manufacturer of all-electric, zero-emission loaders that has found dealer and customer input vital as its products have made headway in industries such as agriculture and mining, with a growing footprint in the landscape space, especially for its MiniZ line of compact loaders.

Marcus Suess, the company's chief operating officer, noted one instance where a suggestion from a customer had an almost immediate effect on the product development and improvement process.

"We make our machines to be as quiet as possible, but we had a customer who said our equipment was almost too quiet," Suess says. "They said other operators working around the equipment wouldn't know when the machine was coming up behind them. Of course, with our equipment in reverse, we have a standard alert beacon ... but they asked if there could be an option to turn that on regardless of the direction the machine goes."

"We were able to get a beta version of that feature to them within a few weeks where they just clicked on the hard mount display to turn that feature on or off. They liked it ... and just a few weeks after that we had a world-wide update available for that option."

#### LEAN, MEAN AND GREEN

First Green Industries has entered the landscape market with all-electric machines.

*Continued on page 17*

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### HOW FMC'S SCION INSECTICIDE HELPED GREEN IMAGE REGAIN CONFIDENCE IN MOSQUITO CONTROL

**L**uke Zimmerman, owner of Green Image Lawn Care in York, Pennsylvania, noted confidence as the biggest benefit he experienced when switching to FMC's Scion insecticide.

"Our focus was finding a solution to our mosquito program, and we first introduced Scion only to this aspect of our operation. We have now integrated Scion into our plant health care and flea and tick programs. The results have been nothing but predictable since the introduction."

Predictability is exactly what the Green Image team was hoping for when they decided to give Scion insecticide a try. Prior to the switch, Zimmerman and his team struggled with the frequency of callbacks they were receiving, particularly with their mosquito program. Green Image saw immediate decrease in callbacks once they incorporated Scion into their lineup.

In fact, Zimmerman and his team were not even advertising their mosquito services in their business model due to cost. "Our leadership team got to the point where we felt providing a mosquito service was more costly than it was worth prior to the introduction of Scion," he says.

Since incorporating Scion in 2023, Green Image has reintroduced the service back into their advertising funnel. "Scion allowed us to gain confidence in the service. We were able to save our customers money by reducing their total annual applications while being excellent stewards of the environment. Win-win all around for our company and customer base," he explains.

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OWNER, GREEN IMAGE LAWN CARE



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Continued from page 15

### CUTTING EDGE

So, what kind of advances and technological improvements should landscape contractors and lawn care professionals expect to see when they're shopping for a new piece of compact equipment or simply browsing the trade show floor at an event like Equip Exposition?

Most industry experts seem to agree that the same popular technological advances that have made their way into other segments of society — think electric vehicles, GPS capabilities on your phone or the ability to remotely check on your home from thousands of miles away — are also front and center in the compact equipment space.

For example, most manufacturers have their own proprietary telemetry systems that track machine location and performance. At Takeuchi, they call it Takeuchi Fleet Management (TFM), a system that provides technical information on machine health

and condition, run time (hours) and machine location, as well as remote diagnostics, scheduled maintenance reminders and customizable alert settings. TFM can also geofence machines to protect them from possible theft.

"Owners don't have to manually track when maintenance needs to happen, and they can have the peace of mind knowing their machines are exactly where they should be," says Takeuchi's Padgett.

Continued on page 18



Lee Padgett



#### TFM NOT TMI

The Takeuchi Fleet Management system gives operators critical insights into the machine's health.

PHOTO: TAKEUCHI

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## PEOPLE PLEASER

Just as important as power and durability is operator comfort, which can increase productivity and employee retention.

*Continued from page 17*

Caterpillar takes a big-picture approach to technological advances in their machines.

“Basically, customers want a machine with the maximum number of capabilities to meet their requirements in the smallest package possible,” Worley says. “That becomes the challenge our engineers take on to meet those expectations.”

In the Cat Next-Gen mini excavators, that’s manifested itself in advances such as adjustable dig speeds,

improved joystick controls and cruise control features. Similar features can be found all along the company’s deep product line that also includes compact track and skid-steer loaders.

But the advances at Caterpillar don’t end with all the modern technologies operators would expect. Worley says the company’s engineers have paid special attention to matters of safety and operator comfort as well, and those changes can pay dividends outside of the cab.

“Safety, comfort and ease of use are as much about employee retention and attracting new workers as anything,” he says. “If you want to attract and retain good employees, you need to give them a machine they feel comfortable in. We can’t expect customers to pay what these machines cost and then expect them to sit on a brick while operating it. We’ve really paid attention to these areas, and I know customers can tell that every day they use the machine.”

## THE CRYSTAL BALL

What’s next for compact equipment over the coming 10 to 15 years? Takeuchi’s Padgett predicts continued innovations and variety in attachments available for compact equipment. He also says improved machine controls will

*Continued on page 20*

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*Continued from page 18*

become the rule and not the exception.

“Machine controls help operators quickly, easily and accurately position their machines, check grade, automate equipment functions and collect data,” Padgett says.

Kioti’s Moe echoes Padgett on increased integration of machine controls into the compact equipment sector. “Things such as automatic grade and things like that are becoming more common within the industry and have come from the larger equipment space,” he says.

Padgett is also bullish on more old-school advancements when it comes to cab design.

“Takeuchi’s machines often have cabs with automotive-style interiors that keep operators comfortable behind the controls longer, increasing productivity,” he says. “These tricked-out cabs have been put into use on larger heavy equipment for a while, and they are now becoming must-haves on compact machines as well.”

At First Green, Suess says the focus will be on advances in both battery technology and increased options for charging those batteries, including solar.

“Battery technology is moving at light speed,” he says. “You’re seeing more battery density fitting into the same packs. I also think you’ll see more solar charging, so operators will be able to outfit a truck or trailer with a solar charger that will be cheaper and way more efficient.”

And while Worley predicts improved technologies and alternative power sources will be top of mind for the Caterpillar team, they won’t let that distract them from making sure the bottom-line effectiveness of their compact equipment products remains the priority.

“I think what we will see is that grade-accuracy technology become more of a standard on the machines,” Worley says. “I believe there will be alternative fuel sources. Can’t tell you what that’s going to be, but I believe there will be carbon neutral solutions of one kind or the other, or even improved power technology that meets all the goals of sustainability and customer expectations.

“At the end of the day, though, I think this equipment will still do what it’s always done,” he says. “They’ll still have a boom stick and a bucket. It’ll still have a track. It will still dig holes. That’s what customers will expect.”

## GREEN GIANTS

When it comes to power sources for compact equipment, diesel engines still rule the day, standard on most of the machines offered by companies *LM* spoke with for this story. Kioti’s line of loaders takes that one step further; the company designs, engineers and manufactures its own diesel engines, as well as most of the components found on its machines.

That doesn’t mean alternative power sources — mainly electric — aren’t on the radar, largely because of the environmental and noise-reduction benefits those engines can offer. Some companies offer electric power as an option right now; others say that electric options are right around the corner.

Then there is First Green Industries, which has been all-electric since it first brought its fleet of loaders to market six years ago. As company COO Marcus Suess explains it, the company has two inventors with origins in aviation manufacturing in Europe to thank for its eventual introduction to North American customers.

“They didn’t technically have the business background or the manufac-



**ELECTRIC COMPANY** First Green Industries hopes to win customers in the landscape market with machines that are smart, energy-efficient and powerful.

turing side of things in this space,” says Suess, who brought experience in heavy equipment sales to the company when he joined in 2022. “But they did have the technical background, so they’ve let their technology lead the way and be the foundation for what we’re doing.”

While the landscape industry only makes up about 10 percent of First Green’s current business, it remains an area of focus with an eye on future growth. And the fact the company’s product offerings were conceived and constructed as electric from the start is a value proposition that is moving

the needle among end-users, according to Suess.

“We started as a company focused on bringing electric to heavy equipment, not the other way around. So, our machines are specifically designed to be much more energy efficient, powerful and smart,” he says. “We wanted to build the best, strongest equipment we could that would get the most out of battery life and do the jobs they were being asked to do.”

Electric isn’t the only thing that differentiates First Green. Although not unique to the compact equipment sector, Suess says remote control options on the MiniZ loaders (as well as some of the company’s bigger machines) can be a game-changer from an efficiency and safety standpoint.

“(The remote) is so precise that you can really creep a machine into a specific spot going less than 0.3 miles per hour,” Suess says. “It can also turn a multi-person job into a one-person job. You can step out of the machine, hold a tarp, dump gravel with the remote, get a different angle or view of what you’re working on. And most importantly, you can remove yourself from a dangerous situation like a hillside and still get the job done.”



## FROM THE SOURCE

# Top tips for a healthy summer lawn

Follow these steps to make sure your customer's lawns thrive all season long

BY REBECCA KNAPP | CONTRIBUTOR

**S**ummer is the best time to enjoy a perfect lawn, but July conditions can cause extreme stress for grass. Keeping your customers' lawns healthy and beautiful can be a challenge in the summer, so here are my top tips to keep your grass at its best.

## KNOW WHAT YOU'LL FACE

Drought stress is the most common issue you'll see in summer, especially in regions of the country prone to hot, dry summers, like Arizona where I live. You should always know whether you're working with warm or cool-season grass. Warm-season varieties, like bermuda, will grow in the summer, but cool-season grasses like Kentucky bluegrass, ryegrass and tall fescue are most active in spring and fall.

Cool-season grasses are more likely to go into dormancy in July and will need more attention to prevent impacts from pests and stress. Preventive measures like humectant applications can assist with consistent soil moisture to prevent summer stress on both cool- and warm-season grasses.

Take stock of your grasses and know what environmental conditions are likely to be like in your area this summer.



Rebecca Knapp

## HAVE RECOVERY OPTIONS

After you've made your initial assessment, think about your recovery plan. If you notice grass is dying, determine the cause before acting. If it's due to drought and heat stress, consider asking your customer about their irrigation cycles to ensure they are watering deeply into the root zone.

Generally speaking, don't apply fertilizers with high nitrogen in summer. Focus instead on secondary nutrients like calcium and micronutrients like iron and manganese, for enhanced color without extra growth.

Insects may also be the cause of dying grass. Grubs and chinch bugs are just two examples of common summer pests. If you suspect insect damage, test the assumption by putting a tin can (with both ends opened) into a shallow hole in the ground and then flooding the can with water. Any insects in the soil will float to the top.

If stubborn areas of grass won't recover, you may need to overseed. Make sure to apply enough water to keep the soil and seed moist for germination. Humectants can also help during seeding as well.

## WATER PROPERLY

One way to make sure grass is getting enough water in hot, dry conditions is

to water deeply. Instruct your customers to water until 4 to 6 inches of soil is moist, which they can check using a metal rod or screwdriver. Deep watering ensures that the entire root zone is reached and makes the grass less susceptible to the effects of evaporation and heat.

Customers should water early in the morning to reduce water loss from evaporation. This will also help prevent diseases; the longer grass blades are wet, the more opportunities there are for disease to take hold.

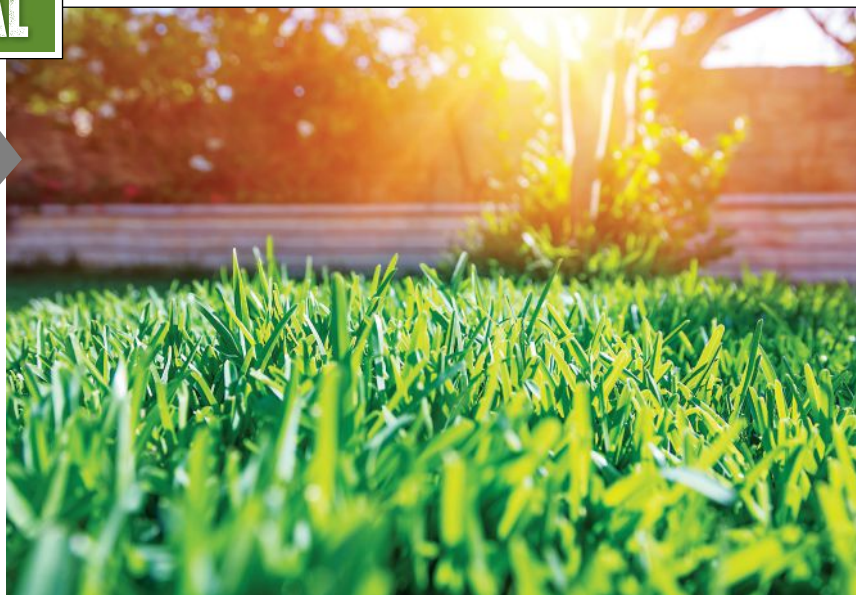
## END THE SEASON STRONG

As summer comes to a close, be sure to prepare for cooler conditions. Think about what fertilizer or soil amendment will best help the specific type of grass. For cool-season grasses that are more active in fall, aerate the soil to allow for proper growth and to reduce damage caused by compaction.

Alternatively, warm-season grasses are about to go into dormancy, so don't encourage growth. You may want to overseed with rye, as is common in the West.

Those are my top five tips for maintaining a healthy lawn. Implement these to ensure success this summer — and all year round! 🌱

Knapp is the Southwest Regional Technical Manager for Arborjet | Ecologel. She has over 12 years of experience dealing with turf and lawns and started her agronomy journey working on Major League Baseball fields. Contact at [RKnapp@arborjet.com](mailto:RKnapp@arborjet.com)



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# GET FED UP WITH GRUBS

Bobby Kerr explains how to deal with these hungry turf pests

BY NATHAN MADER | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

**G**rubbs are a yearly pest for lawn care operators (LCOs), and these hungry beetle larvae will do just about anything to feed on grass roots and kill your turf each summer.

Grubs are white, C-shaped larvae with legs near their heads and soft, worm-like bodies. They feed in early summer before pupating and turning into a beetle that will soon lay eggs in the soil in midsummer, effectively repeating the damaging cycle.

## KNOW YOUR TYPE

Bobby Kerr, technical services manager for Quali-Pro, says the kind of grubs one may experience are often based on their geographic location. For example, Japanese beetle grubs (*Popillia japonica*) and European chafers (*Amphimallon majale*) are more commonly found in eastern and Midwestern states, while masked chafers (*Cyclocephala* spp.) appear more often in the south.

Kerr says other geographical factors such as climate and local environmental conditions could impact the prevalence of each grub type, and knowing what exactly you're dealing with helps identify the most effective solutions.

"Local extension services or agricultural departments often provide region-specific information on the types of grubs and other pests that are common in specific areas, helping LCOs tailor their pest management strategies accordingly," Kerr says.

## FIND YOUR SPOT

Most grubs usually leave a similar path of destruction behind them, such as yellowing, wilting turf, dead patches and loose grass. However, pinpointing the exact kind of damage done by grubs is important to help identify the specific species causing trouble.

According to Kerr, Japanese beetle and European chafer grubs feed on grass roots in a patchy pattern, leading to irregularly shaped dead patches in lawns. Meanwhile, June beetle (*Phyllophaga* spp.) grub damage is more localized, and LCOs can also try identifying the type of beetle present once the adults hatch from the ground.

Kerr says birds and other animals can sometimes dig up grubs munching on grass roots, which can at least indicate where grubs are feeding at the expense of further lawn damage.

"Overall, while the general symptoms of grub damage — wilting, thinning, spongy turf — are similar across different types of grubs, the specific patterns and severity can vary," Kerr says. "Understanding the specific type of grub causing the damage can help LCOs tailor their management strategies more effectively, whether through preventive measures or targeted treatments."

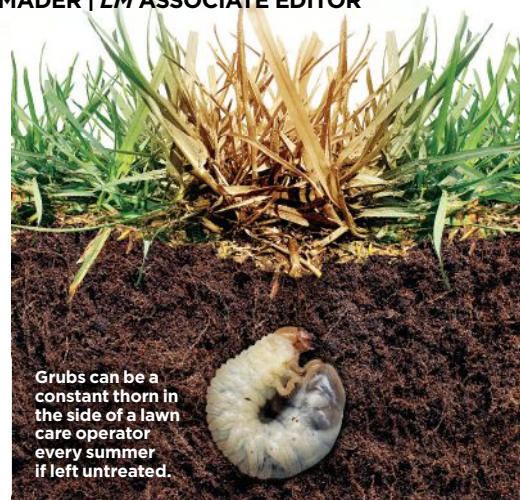
## TREAT THEM RIGHT

Treating for grubs, whether preventively or curatively, is all about timing.

"Proactive monitoring for early signs of grub damage in late spring to early summer allows LCOs to apply preventive treatments at the optimal time, typically in early summer," Kerr says. "Regular observation and timely action are key to effective grub management in lawn care."


Depending on geographic location, catching grubs in the early summer while they're feeding close to the surface is a great way to prevent them, and curative treatments in late summer to early fall may be necessary if further damage becomes evident, Kerr explains.

For preventative treatments, Kerr recommends both insecticides or beneficial nematodes, which can infect and kill larvae in the soil. He says certain



nematode species such as *Heterorhabditis bacteriophora* and *Steinernema feltiae* offer a natural, environmentally friendly approach. New insecticides, such as those containing *Bacillus thuringiensis* strains specific to grub larvae or others with new active ingredients, also offer effective target control with reduced impact on other organisms.

Kerr explains that simple practices such as proper irrigation, mowing and soil management can also keep turfgrass healthy and reduce its susceptibility to grubs.

"(Increase) emphasis on selecting products with lower environmental impact, such as reduced toxicity to non-target organisms and minimal persistence in the environment," Kerr says. "Adopting an integrated approach that combines chemical control with biological and cultural practices can maximize effectiveness while minimizing environmental impact." 

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## THE BIG ONE

### Business in the front

BY NATHAN MADER  
LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

**LOCATION** Salem, Ore.

**COMPANY** Pacific Landscape Management

**DETAILS** Corporate life can be stressful, but Pacific Landscape Management works hard to maintain the relaxing and traversable outdoor landscape for the four buildings located at Salem's Creekside Corporate Center.

A four-person crew maintains the campus doing arbor work, mowing and caring for the heavy vegetation, but Mauricio Flores, associate branch manager, says other specialized employees are required, such as a certified sprayer and irrigation technician for the complicated system of water features.

The property is located along Mill Creek, meaning water features play a heavy role in keeping the campus' peaceful aesthetic. A system of timed pumps, auto fill valves and a well keep water circulating within the reservoir ponds and over the rocky waterfalls.

One interesting tool used on the job is a small boat needed for spreading algae and aquatic weed control products.

"That's not your conventional kind of landscape setup, but it is necessary to help maintain those ponds to get out there and spread out the material," Flores says.

The water features and buildings are all brought together by a large mix of vegetation, including escallonia hedges, maple trees and river birches.

Pacific Landscape Management won a silver award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence program for this project. 🏆

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



PHOTOS: PACIFIC LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT





**Captions |** **1.** Pacific Landscape Management crews spend roughly half a day maintaining the property. They use Toro 21-inch mowers to cut the grass. **2.** A riparian edge surrounds the campus' main pond. Mauricio Flores, associate branch manager, says good water clarity and color is a big goal for his team. **3.** Wooden bridges are a part of the natural trails surrounding the property. Flores says they're being considered for replacement due to old age. **4.** Flores says because the property is older, Pacific Landscape Management balances a mixture of rejuvenation and preserving the existing vegetation. **5.** Flores says safety, clearing brush and hefty arbor work are all key goals in providing natural, shaded areas along the trails. **6.** Waterfalls are one of the methods used to keep water moving to prevent algae and keep a calming aquatic aesthetic throughout the property. **7.** A system of timed irrigation controllers and auto fill valves keeps costs down by prioritizing water conservation throughout the campus.



## MAINTAIN YOUR EDGE

**SAFETY FIRST**  
Eye, hand and leg protection should be a priority when operating a string trimmer.



## Stay safe with string trimmers

Experts share how you can avoid unnecessary injury when using these tools

BY ROB DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

**F**or Michael Bedell, owner of Bedell Property Management in Milford, Mich., keeping employees safe while using hand-held equipment is a must.

Bedell and Dante DeLorey of Triple-D's Lawn Care in Allenhurst, Ga., share tips on how you and your crews can stay safe while running string trimmers.

### START WITH PPE

The basics of string trimmer PPE should be familiar to a landscaper as they include eye protection, hearing protection

and hand protection. Bedell says he always carries an extra pair of safety glasses when he's on a job site after hearing about a close call an employee had.

"He grabbed the trimmer and headed off, and 30 seconds later, he had one of the guys chewing him out, saying you have to put glasses on, something bad could happen," Bedell recalls. "So he stops what he's doing and goes back to the truck and puts the safety glasses on, and 30 seconds later, a rock comes up, hits the glasses and actually shatters the plastic and most likely would've taken his eye out."



On top of eye and hand protection, protecting a user's legs is a major point of concern while using a string trimmer. Solutions for this problem range from wearing long pants to specialized guards from ComfortTrim that DeLorey uses.

"(The debris) just beats your legs up, and out here we have sand that just feels like razor blade taking your skin all day," DeLorey says. "I always wear (leg protection), it's just so annoying having the debris hit my leg, and it can be potentially dangerous."

*Continued on page 30*

PHOTO: HUSQVARNA



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## MAINTAIN YOUR EDGE

*Continued from page 28*

Bedell adds that he's had string trimmer users utilize heavy-duty chainsaw chaps when they need a little extra protection.

### MAINTENANCE CHECKS

In addition to PPE, regular maintenance is a necessary step to make sure operators are safe when using string trimmers. Bedell recommends a quick check of problem areas when it's time to change the line in a trimmer.

"For me, anytime that that line has to be replaced, that's the time to just kind of do a quick minute or two check of the unit to see if anything is loose or broken," he says.

The bump head is a good place to double-check, according to Bedell, as it

gets a lot of abuse. A loose bump head, if not caught in time, could come apart and become a projectile, he says.

"It really only takes a minute or two, and if there's something wrong, it's typically pretty glaring and obvious," he adds.


Bedell also says that his company does a mid-season in-depth maintenance reset. This, he says, allows his employees to operate their machines with the confidence that they will work well in the second half of their operating season.

"It's pulled out and washed, and we go through everything," he says. "We swap out air filters and fuel filters. This way, we're already there doing it versus if I don't, eventually it will get my attention, but it'll be at a really inopportune time that costs us money out in the field."

### ABOVE AND BEYOND

Above being aware of how you can be safe while using a string trimmer, Bedell says that he stresses the importance of keeping others safe to his employees.

He points toward potential hazards such as windows that flying debris could damage or other employees in the field who could be within striking distance if something went wrong.

"It's easy to keep yourself safe, and that's what you should start with," he says. "It's much harder to control all the other outside variables and any piece of equipment like a string trimmer that can discharge an object and move it away from the area that you're working on. It's something that you really have to be attentive to." 

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## REV YOUR ENGINES

### BIGGER AND BADDER

Mower manufacturers are continuing to grow the walk-behind mower market with larger and larger decks.



# Time to make more room on your trailer

**Why walk-behind mowers deserve a spot on your landscape rig** BY MIKE ZAWACKI | CONTRIBUTOR

**W**hile zero-turn mowers reign supreme for sprawling landscapes, relegating the walk-behind mower to the sidelines would be a mistake.

Here are three key reasons why this unsung hero deserves a permanent spot on your landscape maintenance trailer.

### VERSATILITY

Simply put, walk-behind mowers are the workhorses of professional landscaping,

conquering challenges that zero-turn mowers can't handle, says Ron Scheffler, senior product manager at Bobcat Co.

"There's still a necessity for (walk-behind) mowers because they're used on medians and to cut the highly landscaped areas around flowerbeds where you need more control and to fit into tighter spaces, which their smaller decks allow for," he says. "These smaller deck sizes get a landscaper in and out of yards and



landscapes that are more difficult for zero-turns to maneuver into."



Walk-behind mowers are ideal for steeper slopes and hillsides, which can prove challenging to larger, sit-down units, says Maureen McCormack, commercial mowing market manager at John Deere.

Beyond maneuverability, walk-behind mowers offer surprising versatility in deck size. McCormack highlights that professional-grade models can range from 32 inches to a substantial 54 inches, with John Deere planning an even larger 72-inch deck for the near future.

*Continued on page 32*

PHOTO: JOHN DEERE

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## MOWING + MAINTENANCE

### » REV YOUR ENGINES

*Continued from page 31*

Adaptability is another key advantage. With the addition of a sulky, walk-behind mowers transcend their push or self-propelled limitations. This attachment transforms them into stand-on riding mowers, retaining the core advantages of unmatched maneuverability, superior stability on inclines and a tighter turning radius.

Beyond individual performance, walk-behind mowers offer logistical advantages for landscaping companies.

"A walk-behind's smaller size allows you to get more (mower) units on a trailer," Scheffler says. "Now, there's less overhead to manage. So, from a value proposition, walk-behind mowers still have a valid place in the industry and will continue to be so."

#### ATTRACTIVE ENTRY POINT

If you're a contractor entering the landscape maintenance business, a commercial-grade walk-behind mower offers a more affordable price point.

"If you're talking purely commercial-grade mowers, the cost difference between walk-behind and sit-down mowers is going to be between \$3,000 and \$4,000," Scheffler says.

For the fledgling turf maintenance contractor, a commercial walk-behind provides a lot of value for the money.


"If you're new and trying to get established, a smaller, walk-behind unit is going to prove a good quality cut," Scheffler says. "You're forced to (mow) at a slower pace, which allows the grass to get up to the blades and gives a cleaner quality of cut, which helps build credibility when you're first starting out."

#### CONTINUED EVOLUTION

The walk-behind mower is not a stagnant technology, and manufacturers continue to engineer high-tech innovations in newer models to assist the landscape pro in the field.

For example, walk-behind mowers are shedding their gas-powered past and embracing an electric future. Manufacturers are leading the charge with cutting-edge EV (electric vehicle) technology, transforming these mowers into clean, quiet and cost-effective cutting machines for landscape professionals.

McCormack highlights the integration of game-changing data collection and communication technology into these machines. This connectivity has the potential to revolutionize efficiency, security and property management for landscapers.

"You'll get notified if your equipment is going outside of a boundary that you've defined for it," she says. "It also helps you make maintenance and planning your maintenance much easier because it tracks that data and provides alerts." 

Mike Zawacki is a Cleveland-based writer who has covered various aspects of the green industry for the last 20 years.



## TIPSHEET

# Keep your cool in the face of extreme heat

**NALP's Sam Steel shares an update on a new OSHA heat standard** BY NATHAN MADER | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

**H**eat is the leading cause of death among all weather-related phenomena, according to the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (OSHA). It's so severe, in fact, that the issue is now going national.

Sam Steel, safety adviser for the National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP), says a new national standard could soon be in effect if it gets a positive review from

the White House. The rule, titled Heat Injury and Illness Prevention in Outdoor and Indoor Work Settings, is in its final stages of potentially setting a new national standard for heat safety regulations.

"It's a national OSHA standard. It'll have its own unique OSHA standard number and it's going to impact a large number of employers, both indoor and outdoor work site employers in the U.S.," Steel says.

He adds that he anticipates the legislation will be approved quickly, especially as the summer heat peaks across the country. Employees continually exposed to these elements can transition quickly from heat cramps to heat exhaustion and eventually a possibly fatal heat stroke if left unchecked, he explains.

### COMMON SYMPTOMS

Common symptoms of heat stress and exhaustion are nausea, heavy sweating, dizziness and fatigue. Steel says supervisors and management play critical roles

*Continued on page 35*



PHOTO: MARC BRUXELLE / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS / GETTY IMAGES

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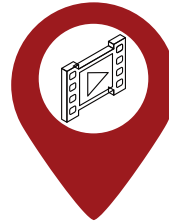
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## TIPSHEET

*Continued from page 33*

in watching for these symptoms, and they should also ask their employees about other, harder-to-notice symptoms they may be experiencing, such as headaches, blurred vision, high heart rate and shallow breathing.

“Company management should ensure that crew managers are aware of heat illness and injury risks on each day that a high heat index will be in effect,” Steel says. “Once the crew reaches the work site, the crew manager should conduct a quick briefing on weather conditions, symptoms of the onset of heat illness and how to prevent heat illness events.”

Another key detail managers need to keep in mind is the acclimatization of their crew to hot weather, which varies

based on a person’s age, hydration and even the medications they may take. New employees not used to manual outdoor labor and older adults taking psychiatric or heart medications may have a much lower tolerance to the heat.


### COMMON MISTAKES

Supervisors and crew members also need to worry about common mistakes in identifying heat stress. For example, Steel says as someone goes from heat exhaustion to heat stroke — when the body’s core reaches 104 degrees F — profuse sweating can stop and turn into dry skin, giving off the illusion of cooling down when, in reality, they need medical attention.

“Even if they say, ‘Well, I’m not thirsty right now,’ make sure they take a little

bit of liquid anyway,” Steel says. “Being thirsty is not a true indicator of whether you’re dehydrated or not.”

Other important things to avoid involve having caffeinated drinks like coffee or soda before or during outdoor work, wearing tight or heavy clothing that doesn’t let the body breathe and doing the hardest manual labor in the early afternoon when the sun is the harshest.

While Steel is hopeful the potential rule sets a more unified standard across the nation for heat safety regulations, he says there are plenty of small steps companies can take to ensure the safety of their crews on the job site. To beat the heat, he recommends allowing for plenty of breaks in shaded areas, sipping water or sports drinks throughout the day and buddying up with another person. 



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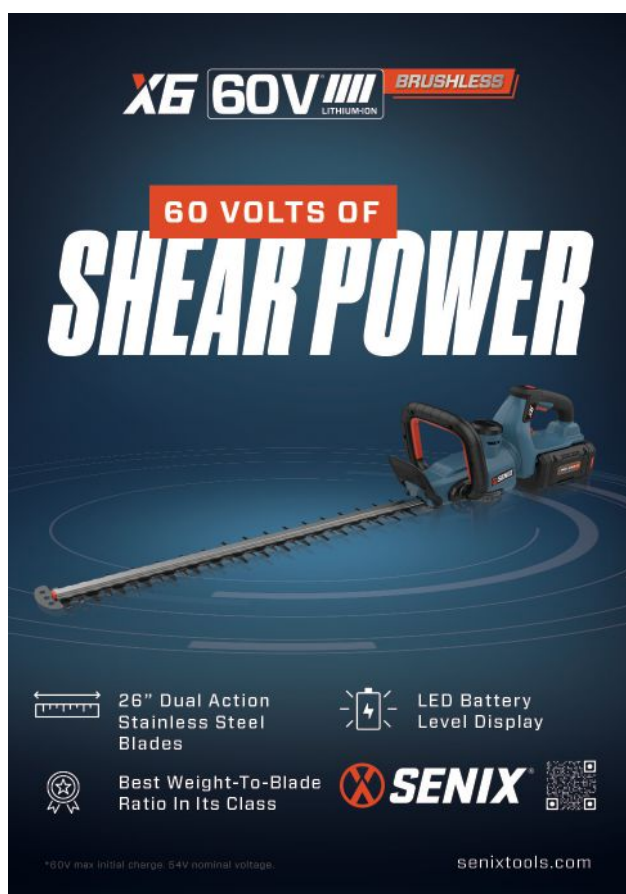
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## HARDSCAPE SOLUTIONS

# Garden paradise

BY ROB DIFRANCO  
LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

**LOCATION** Upper Marlboro, Md.


**COMPANY** McHale Landscape Design

**DETAILS** When the property next to this client's home came up for sale, they purchased it and contracted McHale Landscape Design to install a garden, greenhouse and more.

The project is a fully operational, fruit and vegetable-producing outdoor living space constructed in a residential space. McHale Landscape Design installed terraced garden beds, gates, fences and the entrance to the property. The contractor constructed the fences and gates, made from solid cedar, on site with built-in light and a metal cap to provide long-term durability.

Among the difficulties crews faced was a sharp grade that sloped down toward the "she-shed." To combat this, McHale crews installed river rock to help guide runoff away from the shed. Other stone used in the project include flagstone, which the contractor chose to create consistent width on the joints.

In addition to the design and installation, McHale crews provide maintenance for this residential property.

McHale Landscape Design won a silver award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals Awards of Excellence Program for this project. 

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



1



3



5

PHOTOS: MCHALE LANDSCAPE DESIGN







**Captions |** **1.** A view of the garden during the first year of growing. The combination of natural stone columns with parged concrete walls is tied together with 2-inch gauged flagstone caps. **2.** An in-progress shot of crews constructing the retaining walls, footings and slabs for the hardscapes. **3.** All flatwork is irregular full-range Pa. flagstone. The contractor took time to choose and craft each stone to create a consistent width on the joints. **4.** An in-progress shot shows McHale crews constructing the greenhouse on-site. **5.** McHale planted green velvet boxwood, hydrangea, astilbe, hosta and amsonia to compliment the main entrance to the shed. To the far right, a masonry set of steps leads up to the porch while on the right, rustic boulder steppers also provide access.

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## IRRIGATION TECH

# How maximizing your routes can save you money

**Conserva Irrigation's Russ Jundt shares how route maximization has helped his company**

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

In an industry where efficiency reigns supreme, every minute saved translates directly to the bottom line.

No. 85 on the 2024 LM150 list with a revenue of \$41,841,001, Conserva Irrigation, in Glen Allen, Va., implemented its routing software in 2018, and according to Russ Jundt, president, it's made a huge difference for his company.

Conserva utilizes a built-in route maximizer through the Serviceminder platform. The service is available to all of Conserva's 83 locations nationwide.

Jundt shares how his company utilizes route maximization software and explains why irrigation contractors everywhere should implement it into their businesses.



Russ Jundt

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### ON THE MOVE

Routing maximization software can save both technicians and customers unwanted headaches.



### LANDSCAPE

#### MANAGEMENT: HOW IMPORTANT IS YOUR ROUTING SOFTWARE TO YOUR BUSINESS?

**RUSS JUNDT:** You can't run a business without it. Route density is uber important. It's critical. It is a game changer. You can't be doing a star pattern across the metro, 30 minutes here, 45 minutes here, 25 minutes that way and an hour up that way. You may as well just turn in your keys and go home. The route optimization, finding the best route point A to B and C then back to the shop, is critical.

#### LM: HOW DO IRRIGATION TECHNICIANS RECEIVE UPDATES FROM THE SOFTWARE ON THEIR ROUTE?

**JUNDT:** They have access through a mobile app, which includes not only their route but their work orders. It's also where they are clocking in and out and recording the material and invoicing and all of that. The app carries them through the entire job process.

#### LM: WHAT IS THE COST OF ADDING ROUTING SOFTWARE FOR AN IRRIGATION CONTRACTOR?

**JUNDT:** There are all sorts of out-of-the-box route optimization programs that are available, and most of them are more than affordable. But, really, it'll pay for itself on day one of a 22-workday month because it will save you the missed opportunities when you have crews driving around back and forth, covering their tracks multiple times.

You'll be able to effectively get more work done, and at the end of the day, the more systematized the process in your day, the less that's left up for chance. And the less that's left up to chance, the less likely it is for things to go sideways.

#### LM: WHAT OTHER SERVICES DOES THE ROUTING SOFTWARE THAT CONSERVA USES OFFER TO YOUR TECHNICIANS?

**JUNDT:** The software also provides live updates to the customer when the irrigation technician is out on their route. (The customer) will get an email confirmation upon setting up the appointment. They'll get an email reminder confirmation the day before, and then once the technician clicks

out of that first job and is heading to the next, it sends a push notification via text that says the tech is on their way and they'll be there in X amount of time. 📱



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## BUSINESS BOOSTERS

# How software can grow your snow business

**More than just a spreadsheet, business software offers contractors plenty of new options**

BY ROB DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

**F**or snow and ice contractors, effective software can unlock new money-making potential by saving time and increasing leads.

Joe Pascarella, chief operating officer at WorkWave and a former landscape business owner, shares how the right business software can carry your snow and ice business to the next level.

### COMMUNICATION IS KEY

For Pascarella, the biggest advantage that software can offer a snow and ice

contractor is the ability to communicate not only with employees, but with customers as well.

“The ability to send reminders and notifications and to communicate with the customer is such a big deal for any seasonal event,” he says. “Customers want to know, ‘Where’s my plow driver? What’s going on?’ It’s having the ability to

communicate with the customer that makes software invaluable.”

Software can also push alerts and notifications directly to drivers about potential hazards on their route. Pascarella remembers the days of printing out MapQuest when planning out a snowplow’s route.

Now, with the help of AI algorithms built into software, that is done automatically to maximize efficiency.

“If there’s a huge 80-car pileup on I-75, the only way we had of knowing was to listen to AM news radio in the truck,” he remembers. “Now, if



Joe Pascarella



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something does happen, (the software) can optimize the route based on those dynamic conditions and say, 'Hey, snowplow driver, go to this property first and then that property.'

#### ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Pascarella speaks excitedly about the potential of artificial intelligence to expand what business software can offer the snow and ice contractor.

"The biggest benefit is really automation right now. It's the ability to automate what humans would be doing and have it automated within the tools," he says. "We are shifting more towards advanced AI machine learning within all those capabilities as well. That's where we're going to get creative, and the customers are going to ultimately reap the benefit."

One area where he hopes to expand AI usage is in a predictive way. His goal, he says, is to partner with IoT (Internet of Things) vendors to have sensors on snowplows to be predictive in areas that can damage a contractor's margin.


"When those trucks are moving around the parking lots, and they have a hydraulic line break, that puts that truck out of commission," he says. "We're going in a direction with smart IoT sensors where we can be predictive in that and other areas that destroy snowplow margin."

#### EXPANDED FINANCES

Pascarella says that he's seen an expanded acceptance of utilizing business software on the financial side of things since the start of the pandemic in 2020.

"What I started noticing is that more contractors have started to accept Venmo or Cash App or offering financial tools to finance a project within their portfolio," he says. "We have noticed certainly from a financial acceptability lens, a night and day difference."

In addition to the expanded offerings for payment collection and customer financing, Pascarella says he expects software companies to expand their financial capabilities in the future.



"It's about helping our customers to do more with their customers," says Pascarella. "We can be more of a lender, and in some cases, we go beyond that and explore solutions where our customers can help build credit in their businesses' name." 




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# FIVE QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW BY SETH JONES | LM EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

## Nolan Gore

GENERAL MANAGER & OWNER

TOP CHOICE LAWN CARE

AUSTIN, TEXAS

### 1 What would you like readers to know about Top Choice Lawn Care and how did you get into the business?

We're a residential maintenance company — mow, blow and go. We've currently got 1,733 routine maintenance (customers) for just mowing, and then we have a whole bunch of different packages we also offer. Our bread and butter are mows, but on top of that, we sell all sorts of services up until design/build. My dad is in the business, so I grew up running around a landscape business. He got a phone call when this business was small and looking for a new level. I was in the Marine Corps at the time when he called me and asked, 'Do you want to put your life savings into a little business that is risky?' I said, 'That sounds like a really great idea!' My wife and I moved back, and we've been going for 7 1/2 years since then. It's great, it's been fun and challenging. I fortunately have a great business partner who makes this process a lot easier. He is hugely important to our success.

### 2 What did you learn in the Marine Corps that you apply to your job today?

Stress management. The standards of stress are totally different from the military. A really bad day here — God willing — someone isn't dead. I was 25, 26 and I was running a hundred guys overseas — I was telling them what to do, but I was also telling them when they could eat, when they could call their girlfriend and when they could sleep. When I came into this business at 27, it wasn't strange for me to have guys older than me working for me. It wasn't strange for me to hold people accountable and to recognize and respect their level of competence.

### 3 Do you have a family?

I married my high school sweetheart. We had our first kid, a girl, while I was in the Marine Corps. We've had three sons since then. Ages 8, 6, 4 and 1. Our fourth was born extraordinarily

premature ... like, four months. He was in the hospital for five months, that was last year. It's still an extraordinarily challenging situation for our family. I have much more empathy for suffering now. I understand difficulties in life in a different way than I ever have before.

### 4 What is your favorite tool to get the job done?

The old iPhone. It's inexpensive and from an execution perspective, what you can do with these things is wild. I have 20 crews out there today, and I'm able to communicate with all of them individually or collectively. I write a lot of my marketing on my phone because it's so accessible. I do tons of voice notes to myself. I listen to a lot of books on it. There's just not an ROI that's better than the iPhone.

### 5 Do you have a most memorable day at work?

You remember the bad days. The days people got hurt. The big arguments we've all had with our partners. But it's more fun to talk about the funny things. We recently had a drunk driver drive up the ramp of our box truck, and then hide in the bushes. No one got hurt, and she was arrested before I got there. We had a guy use a customer's two trash cans as his personal men's room. That customer — and that employee — are no longer with us. We had a customer call and explicitly cancel her service because Trump was elected president. That was her reason! Wherever you sit on the political spectrum, that's just funny. You see the best and the worst of humans when you work in this business this long. (U)

#### BEST ADVICE

"There's a difference between what feels steady and what is steady. If you want to be in this business, you have to be ready for that. You have to moderate your emotions."



PHOTO: JACOB SHAW



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# A closer look at Landscape Workshop's continued growth

#27

Ranking No. 27 on the 2024 *LM150* list, Landscape Workshop continues to rocket up the list

BY ROB DIFRANCO | *LM* ASSOCIATE EDITOR

In 2021, Landscape Workshop slotted into the *LM150* list at No. 47 with \$45,305,000 revenue. After three years of double-digit growth, the Birmingham, Ala., company broke into the top 30 at No. 27 on the 2024 list with a revenue of \$106,000,000.

A major driver in Landscape Workshop's ascent up the *LM150* lists in 2023 and 2024 has been a bevy of acquisitions. Supported by Carousel Capital and McKinney Capital, through the first six months of 2024, the company has made six acquisitions.

"We're very specifically looking for companies that fit our business model. Some of that is culture. Some of that is being focused on commercial maintenance," says J.T. Price, Landscape Workshop's CEO. "We're not a single-family residential company. We've tried. We are 80 percent commercial maintenance, 20 percent commercial install."

Price also says the acquisition must be a geographic fit for the Alabama-based company. So far, its 2024 acquisitions have followed this strategy — the company has added new locations through acquisitions in Florida, Georgia, South Carolina and Tennessee.

"We want to be geographically contiguous. We're looking at the cities we're already in and the next city over in every direction," Price says. "So, the next city over for us in the east would be Orlando or Charlotte. To the west, it would be Dallas or Houston or maybe Little Rock or Oklahoma City."

## THE PEOPLE BUSINESS

Price also points toward his staff as a reason for that sustained growth. Landscape Workshop, he says, prides itself on a high-performing culture.

"We've got a very specific culture, and it's not everybody's flavor of ice cream," says Price. "We want to be the best place in the industry for a high performer to work. And I want it to be a little uncomfortable for a low performer."

In Price's mind, that culture has helped Landscape Workshop. He says that the company rarely loses high performers, and, in the landscape business, that's crucial.



Another avenue for Landscape Workshop to find high-performing employees has been its internship program. Price says strong partnerships with nearby universities like Auburn and Mississippi State help add home-grown employees who buy into the company's culture.

"We have 16 interns this summer and you hope 10 of those come back after graduation, seven or eight of those become account managers," he says. "We're going to get some great people in acquisitions, but we also need to be growing folks who buy into what we're trying to do here in terms of professionalism and consistency of product."

**Landscape Workshop CEO J.T. Price takes pride in his company's high-performing employees and culture.**

## FIELD TRIPPING

Landscape Workshop recently hosted a National Association of Landscape Professionals Field Trip. Price sees the event, which brought nearly 200 association members to the company's headquarters, as a major win for the company.

"Our guests got something out of it, and I was really proud of our team," he says. "I tend to be focused on what I'm not happy about, so it was a chance for me to see our business through other people's eyes and say, 'Hey, there's a lot of good stuff going on here.'"

In addition to being a good experience for Price, he hopes the inside look that attendees got at Landscape Workshop's operations serves as a potential recruiting push for future acquisitions.

"You hope people had a good experience, but you also hope there's somebody in the room who says, 'I buy into what these guys are selling at Landscape Workshop. Maybe I should consider selling my business to them when that time comes.'"



J.T. Price





**BY JEFFREY SCOTT**

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

# Rockstars don't exit plan, but you should

**E**very year I go to the New Orleans Jazz & Heritage Festival, a 13-stage extravaganza of music, food and culture. I look forward to seeing all the up-and-coming talent and big names. This year I was excited to see Mick Jagger and The Rolling Stones.

That rocker is 80 years old. He could be my father! The only other time I saw them was also in New Orleans, back in 1981. The Stones were already "old" back then.

I find it intriguing that artists like Jagger don't think about exit planning. Painters keep painting well into their final decade of life. Actors keep acting, and bands keep playing as long as people keep paying.

They love their craft and do it out of passion. They also do it for money, even if they don't need it (*ahem* Mick).

## WATCH OUT FOR THE TRUCK

Rock 'n' roll bands don't develop succession plans, either. They only think about replacing a member after he or she has an untimely death. You, on the other hand, can't be so reckless.

What will happen if you — or a key person — suddenly get hit by a beer truck? It's incumbent upon you to go through that exercise and put the answers in writing.

Your leadership team wants to know the answers. Plus, it will help you uncover where your company is deficient.

## THE 10-YEAR PLAN

A well-known book on exit planning — *Finish Big* — claims you need to plan ahead 10 years to do it right. Some entrepreneurs need that long to wrap their heads around the big changes that need

to happen. It's a nice luxury but not always needed.

I have worked with many entrepreneurs who come to us with ten-year BHAGs (Big Hairy Audacious Goals) that we are able to achieve in five to six years. We speed up progress using focus, smarts and out-of-the-box thinking.

If you want out in five to 10 years, aim for five and then decide from there what you want to do.

Even if you are young and still on your growth curve, it helps to set up both an exit plan — making it salable — and a high-value plan — maximizing its value.

Just because God laughs at our plans doesn't mean we should not make them. It means the opposite — start planning earlier. The Rolling Stones don't need an exit plan, but you do.

## IS YOURS A LIFESTYLE BUSINESS?

Some owners run their businesses just like Mick Jagger, as a lifestyle. These owners don't plan to sell; they just want to keep doing their thing, and then liquidate it all at the end.


The problem is many owners start off with that plan but then change their minds as they get older, in which case they must work fast to transform their business for exit.

We are working with a couple of entrepreneurs right now on that "sprint" it's not easy, but it's doable.



A long-term plan doesn't happen magically; it requires quarterly implementation starting today. Would you like to retire in place at some point in the future? Start working on that plan now.

Even in the busy time of the year, make sure your efforts are being invested in the right activities. Each and every quarter you should be working on "one thing" to build up the continuity and value of your business. It's called the One Thing rule.

Whatever your thoughts and desires, the first step is a conversation about goals. Reach out and we can have that conversation. 



**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).

# Crafting a brand voice to reach customers

It's often said there is nothing new in the media. When every source is saying the same thing, it all becomes noise. The only way to break through is with an original voice that offers fresh perspectives.

Our industry is thriving, which is attracting more competitors. Whether you have been in business for 25 years or are just starting out, it's important to create a brand voice that captures the interest of your target customers.

Crafting your brand voice is a communication challenge you can master. It's a combination of what feels right for your business and resonates with its loyal customers. It should reflect the personality of the business, which is typically represented by its mission. Yet, its most important quality is being uniquely distinctive.

It's nothing more than developing a common language with customers. Pay attention to the trigger words and phrases they use and make them memorable. Comedians do this with callbacks. They call back

“Being intentional with your words reinforces your core message and the promises you stand behind.”

or mirror earlier humor to make the current conversation relatable for their audience.

## THEY SOUND LIKE THEY KNOW ME

The source of these relatable words and phrases are the aspirations, common fears and buying objections of current or prospective customers. You will find them in your CRM sales conversation notes, Google Profile reviews and social media comments.

My residential design-build company received the following requests so frequently that we incorporated them into our marketing whenever possible.

- Lush green lawn
- Natural stonework
- Understated elegance

Make the words of your customers part of your signature voice. Another source of important words is Google Ads. Our True Nature Marketing clients often discover that their most powerful keywords are the names of their states, cities, communities or regions.


This is important because Google is by far the top searchable source for what every business has to say. And you can be assured that AI will take this to the next level. Being intentional with your words reinforces your core message and the promises you stand behind.

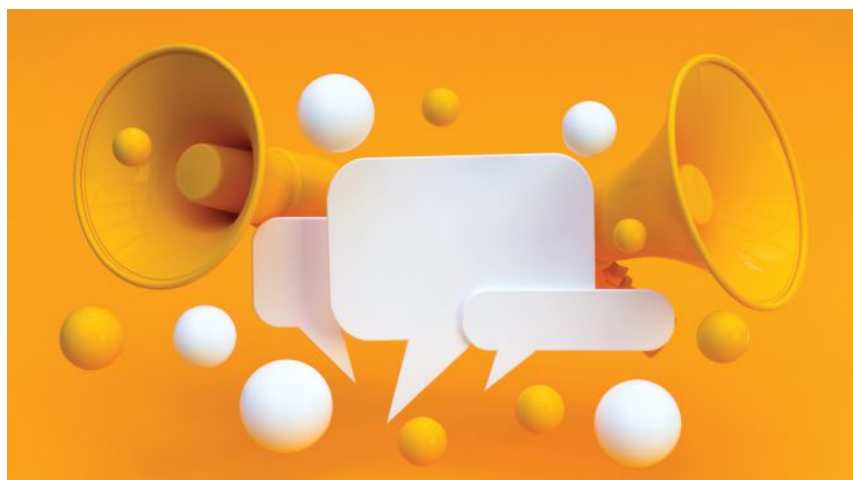
Make this a strategy that you methodically implement, year after year, to grow your business. However, be careful your voice does not drift to the middle of the road. When you take a stand on important issues, your brand voice only gets stronger.

Consider the following tactics when situations present themselves.

- Debunk common myths that are no longer relevant
- Offer a contrarian viewpoint in a compelling way
- Explain your business journey and why it matters

Will your brand voice change as you grow? Maybe, but it only needs to become a better version of itself. The brand voice should make transitions carefully and gradually.

It's easy to judge your words. Instead, simply read the room that is your audience of potential customers and balance that with who you are as a company. Keep your focus on being useful. When you occasionally hear them say you sound like you know them, you'll know you are getting it right. 





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or Associate Editor Rob DiFranco ([rdifranco@northcoastmedia.net](mailto:rdifranco@northcoastmedia.net)) and you could be featured in an upcoming issue of LM.



LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT (ISSN 0894-1254) is published monthly by North Coast Media LLC, 1360 East 9th Street, 10th Floor, Cleveland, OH 44114. Subscription rates: For US, Canada and Mexico, 1 year \$64.95 print and digital; two years \$99.95 print and digital. All other countries, 1 year print and digital \$174.95; two years \$259.95. For air-expedited service, include an additional \$75 per order annually. Single copies (prepaid only) \$10 plus postage and handling. For current single copy or back issues, call 847-513-6030. Periodicals postage paid at Cleveland OH 44101-9603 and additional mailing offices. POSTMASTER: Please send address change to Landscape Management, PO Box 2090, Skokie, IL 60076. Printed in the U.S.A.



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BY MARTY GRUNDER

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## What should you consider in your facility?

In my nearly 30 years as a consultant in the landscaping industry, I have visited well over 200 different landscaping companies. I have seen facilities that are impressive, ones that are efficient, and then some that were just plain bad, too.

I've seen facilities that were built, bought and even rented. I don't think there's a right or a wrong way to handle this, it's about what works best for your business.

I will tell you what we did, we built the facility we operate out of in Dayton, Ohio, 31 years ago. Despite my best efforts to think through what we would want and need in a facility as a 25-year-old, there were, of course, things I missed. We've made changes, done renovations, built additions and converted storage or garage space into more functional spaces.

In the WAM (World According to Marty) your facility needs to be three things: efficient, clean and functional. Here's what we've done at Grunder Landscaping Co. (GLC) to make our facility all three of those.

### EFFICIENT

We have carefully thought out the flow of our yard so that it fits the way that we work. Trucks come in and out one way, we have two loading zones for plant material, a loading zone that can accommodate two trucks loading at a time for mulch, cobbles and compost, and then an area where we store and load larger, bulkier materials (pavers, boulders, etc.)

**“In the WAM (World According to Marty), your facility needs to be three things: efficient, clean and functional.”**

We compost onsite and have an area dedicated to that too. Each truck and trailer have an assigned, marked parking spot and team members have a designated parking area for personal vehicles.

Every member of our sales team, administrative team and all production managers have a workstation with at least two monitors (some have three) so that they can work efficiently at their desks too.

### CLEAN

Cleanliness helps us to be efficient. We put things back where they go so the next time we need them, we can find them quickly.

Cleanliness is also about the message we are sending to our team about what matters. They're on our property for around 30 minutes each morning and in that time, we're reinforcing our cleanliness expectations for their trucks, job site and person.

My thought has always been, “If I wouldn't want to use our crew bathroom, why would they?” I believe the cleanliness of your bathroom says a lot about how much you value your team.

You'll often catch our team washing off their muddy boots outside before coming into the office, walking around in their socks because

their shoes are drying or grabbing the vacuum to clean up if they tracked in some dirt. You'll see them taking the same approach to their vehicles and to the properties we work on.

### FUNCTIONAL

You won't find a fancy office if you come to visit us on one of our GLC Field Trips. Most of our office furniture comes from Amazon or discount office supply places, and we decorate the walls with pictures from properties we care for.

Whether you're inside or outside on our property, you'll find yourself in a space that's set up for functionality first and foremost. We want to make things easier on ourselves and our teams.

If you're contemplating building a new facility, buying an older one, renting or making changes to your existing space I hope you give thought to how you can maximize the efficiency, cleanliness and functionality of that space for your team. I always recommend touring some of the facilities of other successful landscaping companies — learn from their mistakes and their successes.

I'd love to see you this fall at GLC if you're looking for inspiration — come see me!



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