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November 2024 VOL 63, ISSUE 11

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[HANDHELD HELPER]

Pro's Toolbox

Have a favorite tool to get the job done? What are your company's top products of 2024? Let us know by filling out LM's Pro's Toolbox form at bit.ly/3YpFOHe. Please submit all recommendations and information by EOD Nov. 6, 2024.



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SCOTT HOLLISTER
EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

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or shollister@northcoastmedia.net.



It's time to relish the opportunity

As someone who's worked in publishing for more than 30 years, deadlines are nothing new to me.

That doesn't mean the stresses and strains that come with them have changed much from the day I walked into my first newsroom way back when. I'm older (obviously) and more mature (debatable) now than I was back then, so I probably manage those things better than I used to. But the pressures of a looming deadline don't really change all that much, whether it's your first time facing them or your thousandth.

I was reminded of this publishing truism while the *LM* team was working on this issue of the magazine. During the first few weeks of October, our crew found itself navigating our usual writing and editing duties, a compressed production cycle to get all that work done and our preparations for Equip Exposition and Elevate — all at the same time. That equation of more work and less time to do it in added up to plenty of frayed nerves and jacked-up stress levels, at least for this guy.

In my case, I know those uneasy feelings were exacerbated by the fact that I'm still relatively new to all this with *LM*. When you have the benefit of experience, trying periods such as these are a little easier to manage; you survived them before, you'll survive them again. When it's your first rodeo ... well, convincing yourself of that is a little harder.

In the midst of it all, though, I got a familiar reminder about why I was putting myself through all of this, words of wisdom that helped me rally in the face of adversity and can help others grinding

“I've had to remind myself that these new challenges ... were what I wanted. I was ready to try something new. I was ready to tackle something different.”

through hard times in their businesses. Those words came from a pretty unlikely source — professional golfer Max Homa.

At the 2023 Ryder Cup — for the non-golf fans out there, that's the biennial competition between teams from the U.S. and Europe — Homa faced a critical putt on the final day of competition. Ultimately, it wouldn't matter all that much as the European team would go on to win by a wide margin, but Homa had played well all week, and at the time, this putt was to win his match and delay the inevitable, at least for a little while.

Afterward, this is what he told the golf podcast “No Laying Up” about that moment: “I remember being over that putt saying, ‘You asked for this. You can be nervous, but you asked for this exactly, so you better at least relish the opportunity.’”

Man, did that hit home. Homa's words rang true while I was going through the decision-making process to leave the relative comfort of a job I had held for more than a quarter of a century for this new opportunity with *LM*, and I've revisited them again when challenges have presented themselves in the sixth months since I've taken this leap.

I've had to remind myself that these new challenges and different experiences were what I wanted. I was ready

to try something new. I was ready to tackle something different. And I would be doing it for a great magazine with a great staff and a great company standing behind me. It was OK to be nervous and unsure of myself, but it helped to be reminded again that this was what I asked for and that I was ready to embrace the opportunity.

And it might help you too as you assess your career and your business. Maybe you're dealing with staff shortages, increased competition or are searching for ways to differentiate your company in the marketplace. Maybe you're looking to expand by buying another landscaping company, or maybe you're the one entertaining an offer to be purchased by another group.

Regardless, these situations create stress, tension and unease. When that happens, remind yourself that this is what you hoped for in your career. You wanted to build something sustainable, and you wanted your business to grow. Doing those things comes with challenges but managing those challenges and eventually succeeding is why you got in the game.

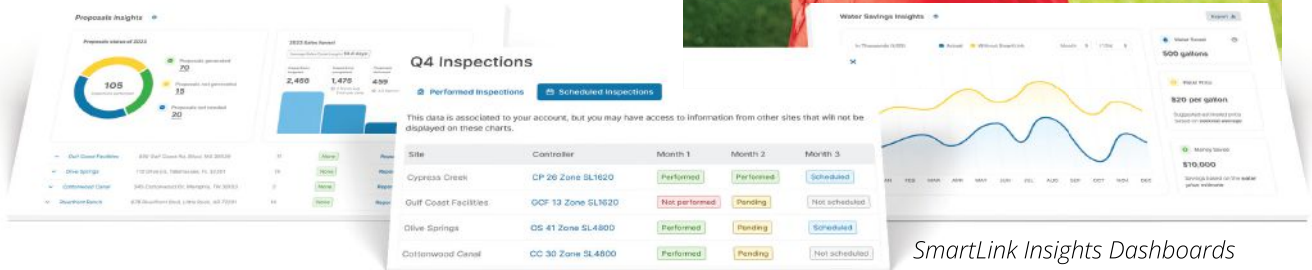
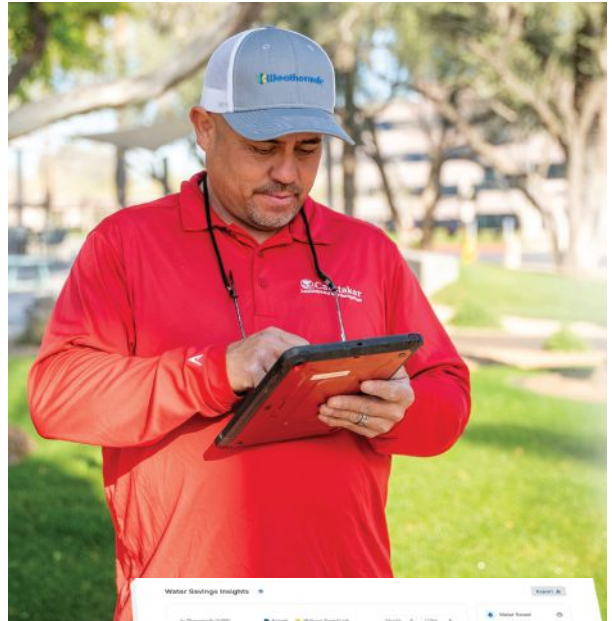
Remember, it worked for Max Homa; he drained that putt to win his match with Englishman Matt Fitzpatrick. It worked for me; since you're reading this right now, you probably already guessed that we got another awesome issue of *LM* out the door and had great trips to both Equip and Elevate. And I know it will work for you too. 🍀

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How does your company celebrate and recognize your employees?

“We take a lot of pictures of our people in production and administrative support. Then we hang them around our branch offices as well as our main building. We even have folks who have moved on, hoping to see them come back as huge successes.”



Landscape Professionals

Richard Bare

Arbor-Nomics Turf
Norcross, Ga.

Troy Clogg

Troy Clogg Landscape Associates
Wixom, Mich.

Pam Dooley

Plants Creative Landscapes
Decatur, Ga.

Paul Fraynd

Sun Valley Landscaping
Omaha, Neb.

Mike Haynes

The Loving Companies
Charlotte, N.C.

Luke Henry

ProScape Lawn &
Landscaping Services
Marion, Ohio

Chris Joyce

Joyce Landscaping
Cape Cod, Mass.

Aaron Katerberg

Grapids Irrigation
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Jerry McKay

McKay Landscape Lighting
Omaha, Neb.

Bryan Stolz

Winterberry Landscape
& Garden Center
Southington, Conn.

Greg Winchel

Winchel Irrigation
Grandville, Mich.

Industry Consultants

Neal Glatt

Grow the Bench
Boston, Mass.

Marty Grunder

The Grow Group
Dayton, Ohio

Phil Harwood

Tamarisk Business Advisors
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Jeffrey Scott

Jeffrey Scott Consulting
New Orleans, La.



“We’ve built much of our culture around celebrating the work our team does for our clients — celebrating anniversaries, birthdays

and promotions, awards throughout the year and year-end focused on our company core values and safety. The most important recognition we do is provide transparency and a voice to our team through employee pulse surveys, town halls and small group training. Giving them a seat at the table builds trust and leads to better outcomes for all.”

“There are many ways we do this, and they all involve specific and genuine praise. My favorite is a handwritten and detailed note mailed to the team member’s home with a gift card. I think we overlook small gestures like this, and they make a big impact.”



“This year, we are hosting a company-wide picnic at a local camp with rock climbing, catered lunch, swimming and other activities, and we invited our entire team and their families. A very small thank you to people who give their all to make us successful.”



MORE ONLINE

See more great advice and complete answers from our Editorial Advisory Board in the online version of this feature at 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 Paving the way The **LM** team took a trip out to Grant, Mich., to check out Porous Pave's facility and operations. Pictured (left to right) are Connor Ouwinga, Porous Pave's national sales manager, **LM**'s Nader Hassen, and Porous Pave's owner Dave Ouwinga.

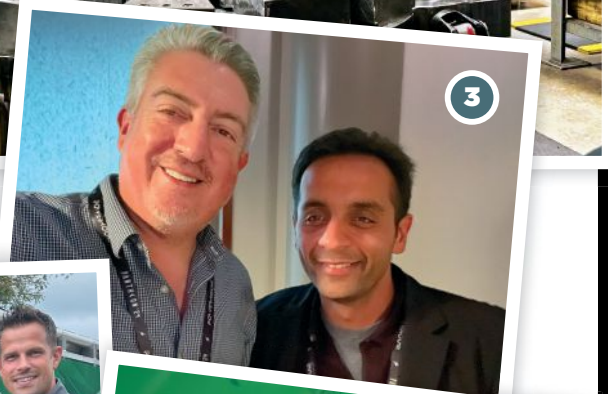
2 Show and tell Ryan Ladley, the vice president of operations at Echo, led a tour of the company's production facility in Lake Zurich, Ill., during the Power-On-Athon 2024 product launch event, where Echo unveiled 10 new products.

3 Pantheon 2024 During the ServiceTitan (parent company of Aspire Software) Pantheon 2024 user conference in Orlando, **LM**'s Editorial Director Seth Jones (left) was able to grab dinner with Anmol Bhasin, ServiceTitan's chief technology officer.

4 The mulch men (From left to right) Nathan Mader, **LM** associate editor; Andrew Maillis, Brown Equipment Co. equipment consultant; and Shane Salyer, BEC director of sales, discussed the key features of the Mulch Mule at the company's recent open house and demo day.

5 Service with a smile Kerry and Jill Cline, the owners of C&S Lawn Service & Landscape in Wadsworth, Ohio, with **LM** Group Publisher Bill Roddy (right) at the BEC open house and demo day at the company's North Canton Service Center.

6 Forging a partnership **LM**'s Hassen (left) and Craig MacGregor (right) spent some time with Matt Smith (center), the owner of Steel Green Manufacturing, during a recent visit to the company's Lebanon, Ind., facility.



NALP Field Trip showcases Sebert Landscape

BY SCOTT HOLLISTER | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Jeff Sebert's early days in the landscaping business were spent working out of a small, rented detached garage, where any flat surface he could find often served as his office desk.

Now, Sebert Landscape — No. 60 on the 2024 *LM150* — boasts more than 600 employees spread out over eight branches (a ninth just opened in Madison, Wis.) and a gleaming, environmentally friendly headquarters in the Chicago suburb of Bartlett, Ill. When he considers all that, Sebert admits those modest beginnings often seem like another lifetime ago.

What has remained unchanged since those early days, he said, is his passion for the work and his unwavering commitment to operating in a way that benefits both the community and the environment.

"I have always believed that we have an obligation within the green industry to live up to that name," Sebert said during the opening presentation at last week's National Association of Landscape Professionals' (NALP) Field Trip at Sebert Landscape, hosted by Marty Grunder.

"That's why we've taken the approaches that we have as a company, whether that's with the green roof and the solar power at our headquarters building, our use of battery-powered equipment or the creation of our sister company, Bluestem (Ecological Services)."


Sebert's 30,000-square-foot corporate headquarters and the predominantly electric fleet that operates out of there were the main attractions for the more than 200 attendees who traveled to the Windy City for the event. The tour of the LEED-certified building included stops that highlighted the building's planning and design, the unique green roof that features 6,500 square feet of landscape plantings, native grasses and a large reclaimed wood deck, its use of solar to power all operations and the battery-powered tools that 18 crews use as their primary equipment each and every day.

They also received an in-depth examination of Sebert's operations, which shared best practices the company had developed over the years in areas such as sales, marketing and human resources.



Sebert Landscape's 30,000-sq. ft., solar-powered corporate HQ in Bartlett, Ill., was the main attraction at the NALP Field Trip.

Among the attendees checking it all out and taking copious notes was Kirsten Mains, the vice president of Brilliant Borders Landscaping in Des Moines, Iowa. Even before learning about the Field Trip, she had planned to be in Chicago for SiteOne Landscape Supply's Women in the Green Industry event.

"We're trying to scale our business and are preparing to move into a new building, so I wanted to see how a large operation runs its operation," she said. "There was a lot that I learned from the experience, but also a lot where I learned that we might be further ahead than we sometimes think we are." 

SENSKE ACQUIRES A PAIR OF GEORGIA COMPANIES

The Senske Family of Companies, No. 29 on the *LM150* list and a home services industry company, expanded its portfolio with the acquisition of Arbor-Nomics and Simply Organic Turf Care, both based in Georgia. This growth marks Senske's entry into the Southeast.

Arbor-Nomics, founded in 1980 by industry pioneer Richard Bare, an *LM* editorial advisory board member, has four locations across the Atlanta metro area, and in 2014, Arbor-Nomics took Simply Organic Turf Care under its wing. Although

Bare has since stepped back, the family tradition is alive and thriving under the leadership of his children, Josh Bare, president, and Tricia Houck, CFO, according to the company.

"Joining forces with Senske Family of Companies is a great next chapter that brings exciting opportunities for our customers and employees," said Josh Bare. "This partnership allows us to leverage Senske's vast resources while continuing the legacy my father started. We're ready to take Arbor-Nomics and Simply Organic to new heights."

Brown Equipment Co. hosts open house for Ohio landscapers

BY NATHAN MADER | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Brown Equipment Co. (BEC), a dealership offering equipment and service solutions in several Mid-west markets, invited local industry professionals to its North Canton Service Center in Ohio for an opportunity to network and explore multiple high-end machines and products.

One such machine was the Mulch Mule, a large landscaping trailer designed to save manpower and labor hours as it transports and distributes a variety of materials, including mulch, soil, leaves, stone and more.

"It reduces the need for additional labor, it reduces labor hours — so it's a labor saver — it drastically boosts morale and retention and it increases safety on a jobsite," said Andrew Maillis, equipment consultant at BEC.

The Mulch Mule now has a wireless remote controller for easier operation.


Also at the open house was Jeff Gregg, operations manager for Wadsworth, Ohio-based C&S Lawn Service and Landscape. He said his company's productivity has skyrocketed since getting a Mulch Mule, and his crews can stay fresher.



"Our guys love it, especially the guys who were around before when we used to just shovel out of trucks. It makes their lives tenfold easier," Gregg said. "The fact that they can roll up to a shoot, hit a button, they can fill up their wheelbarrow and they're off and they don't have to jump into the bed of a truck, shovel out and then jump back down and take off, it's cutting the physical labor that they're doing by like a third."

"We take pride in providing training to our customers and focusing on it being a partnership," said Jamie Read, marketing director for BEC.

In addition to viewing the Mulch Mule and all the other equipment offered by BEC, Gregg said the open house and industry events in general are great opportunities to learn from peers and connect with others.

"Coming to stuff like this I think is integral for the growth of your company," he said. "Networking, speaking to people, meeting people — even if they are technically competition — it is very good to come to stuff like this and meet your peers and to talk to people and to open up that network." 

Jeffrey Scott's Financial Master Class returns in '25

Jeffrey Scott will hold his virtual "Financial Master Class — Roll Up Your Sleeves and Dig Into Your Numbers" from Jan. 8-9, 2025. This class will help attendees learn the financial tools to maintain and improve the performance of their green industry business. Early bird registration ends on Nov. 21, saving attendees \$200 per ticket. Register and learn more at jeffreyscott.biz/fmc/

The master class will run four hours each day with interactive breakout sessions so attendees can share and learn from other business owners in the industry.

During the Financial Master Class, Scott will cover five areas that he says will make 2025 your best year ever:

- **Benchmarking:** Compare your financials and other metrics with the industry, find where you are doing better or worse. Find the easy (and not so easy) improvements to make in your budgeting, planning and pricing assumptions.
- **Economic predictions:** What to plan for in 2025, with insights and actions from experts.
- **Valuation strategies and case studies:** What to do in 2025 to position your company for higher value.
- **Key performance indicators:** Choosing the KPIs that will make a real difference in your year-end results.
- **Rolling budget and capacity planning:** Learn to use these two tools and how to make adjustments mid-year to ensure a healthy profit in 2025.

Do it right at Elevate 2024

The National Association of Landscape Professionals' annual show heads to Charlotte, "where the real pros go."

BY SETH JONES
LM EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

There's an old saying that goes, "if you're going to do something, you might as well do it right."

That's a mantra Britt Wood, CEO of the National Association of Landscape Professionals, the host association of Elevate, can appreciate. Now in year three, Elevate is finding its stride within the industry as a must-attend event for the landscape and lawn care industry. Their slogan for the event is

"Where the real pros go."

Wood says the difference between Elevate and other industry trade shows and conferences is that this event is planned by landscape and lawncare contractors and executed by the NALP staff.

"What we try to do is make sure that there's time to do everything right," Wood says. "Even if you go to the exhibit hall, we deliberately didn't allow people to get really large booths because we wanted it

PHOTO: NALP. ILLUSTRATION: ABERT84 / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS / GETTY IMAGES



to be walkable. We want this all centered around the landscape and lawn care community, specifically the contractors, but also allowing the suppliers to really engage with those contractors.”

Elevate 2024 takes place this month from Nov. 3-6 in Charlotte, N.C. Along with Wood, *Landscape Management* talked to industry professionals about why they find Elevate a must-attend event. We also took a look to see what speakers seemed most likely to be rewarding. And for fun, we asked a few locals what restaurants and attractions attendees from out of town should put on their to-do list.

THE POWER OF PEER-TO-PEER

Kyle Narsavage, president of GreenSweep, Silver Spring, Md., admits he’s not an unbiased source for *Landscape Management* — he serves on the NALP’s

education committee for Elevate. But he’s also very close to the event and can attest to the efforts he and his fellow committee members make to ensure Elevate is a worthwhile conference for attendees.

“I think (Elevate) stands out from other conferences because it’s mostly peer-to-peer. A lot of the education tracks are run by peers,” Narsavage says. “Nothing against consultants, but getting great educational topics and information from peers who have been there, who have done that and are currently doing it, I think is invaluable.”

Narsavage adds a bonus about Elevate: the accessibility of the speakers.

“It’s not intimidating because the event is so open and welcoming. There’s a low barrier of entry to go talk to the speakers,”

Continued on page 12



Breakfast with Champions is a popular tradition at Elevate, with roundtable discussions led by moderators. LM’s Scott Hollister will lead a discussion this year.

Speaker spotlight

THREE KEYNOTES TO KEEP AN EYE ON

The daily keynote is a big part of the Elevate experience. This year, a diverse cast of speakers will be coming to Elevate to speak on a variety of topics.

“All three of our daily keynotes are going to be awesome,” Britt Wood, CEO, NALP, says. “The first one is about positive thinking leading to results ... the next day, she’s a wiz on AI, and we’re all talking about AI ... and the last one, Lauren Sisler, who is an ESPN reporter, she’s got a fantastic story to share.”

Here’s a look at the three speakers:

SHAWN ACHOR

Achor, a Harvard alum, is a leading expert on happiness and success. He’s delivered talks to audiences worldwide, including Marines, NBA owners, CEOs and Fortune 500 companies. He is a *New York Times* bestseller with books “The Happiness Advantage” and “Big Potential” and has been featured in *Harvard Business Review*, TED (with over 25 million views) and PBS.



NOELLE RUSSELL

Russell is an award-winning technologist who helps companies incorporate emerging technologies like AI into their operations. She emphasizes the importance of understanding AI’s impact on various industries, from water management to design software. Her insights on the implications of AI on business and leadership are invaluable for navigating the evolving landscape of technology.



LAUREN SISLER

Sisler is an Emmy-winning sportscaster and mental health advocate who uses her personal experiences to inspire others to overcome challenges in their work. She speaks about resilience, addiction prevention and mental health, empowering audiences to rebound from tragedy with courage and gratitude.



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Continued from page 11

Narsavage says. "You might run into them in the hallway. Or, the speaker you saw at 10 a.m. is now sitting next to you at the class you took at 12 p.m."

Narsavage feels strongly about the education offered at Elevate but also appreciates the other opportunities, like the trade show, the speakers and the social events.

"I tell people, don't miss this event because it's a great opportunity," he says. "Whether it's the expo floor or the education sessions, you're going to make connections that can really improve and impact your business."

PROMOTING GROWTH

Justin White, CEO of K&D Landscaping, Watsonville, Calif., says of the numerous events he attends in a given year, he ranks Elevate as the No. 1 most important for multiple reasons. It has the best educational offerings combined with speakers who have real-world experience, he says. The event also offers excellent networking opportunities, he adds. Finally, he says he feels the NALP creates an atmosphere of community for the industry at Elevate.

"When you're at Elevate, it feels like you're there because you want to see this industry successful for the long term," White says. "I feel camaraderie there —

it almost feels like volunteerism by being at the show."

Expect a larger crowd of more than 2,000 attendees at this year's Elevate, again larger than the previous year's event.

White brings an assortment of coworkers with him to all the events he attends. It's an expensive proposition to bring multiple employees with him — White estimates

PHOTOS: NALP

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“This is the greatest thing about this community: It’s a welcoming community that shares. That’s the reality of this industry.”

— BRITT WOOD, CEO OF THE NATIONAL ASSOCIATION OF LANDSCAPE PROFESSIONALS



NALP CEO Britt Wood says that, based on attendee feedback, this year’s Elevate will offer a slight reduction in the number of classes, and the addition of a new program called “Let’s Talk Shop.”

it costs around \$5,000 to \$6,000 per employee when adding in not just the travel expenses, but also the time away from work. Still, he believes it to be worthwhile because it’s an investment in people.

“It promotes growth within your company,” White says. “When you go to a conference, you compress

maybe three months of learning into three days.”

White adds that he believes when someone travels for his company, they’re more likely to stay with the company.

“They feel elevated — no pun intended,” White says. “It builds camaraderie among your team.

Those six people are going to have a shared experience, and when we get back, we’re going to talk to the others about what we learned.”

LET’S TALK SHOP

Wood agrees with those sentiments of Justin White. He adds that Elevate

Continued on page 14



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Continued from page 13

offers a reception for first-time attendees, where he and his staff, along with NALP's board members, greet the newcomers and advise them on how to get the best out of the event.

"We want to make sure our board gets a chance to meet these folks," Wood says. "This is the greatest thing about this community: it's a welcoming community that shares. That's the reality of this industry. I've worked for so many different industries where they won't talk to each other. (In) this industry, everybody talks, everybody shares."

From the first Elevate in 2022 to the 2023 Elevate, the NALP saw a jump in attendance from around 1,250 to more than 2,000 attendees. Wood said he expects another jump in attendance, but not as significant as from year one to year two. They've also made a change to offer fewer classes in 2024 based on attendee feedback. There will be 38 classes, down from 45 in 2023.



"We're going to try something new called, 'Let's Talk Shop' where attendees can break out into specific communities, like landscape maintenance, irrigation, design/build, lawn care — and have discussions that are pressing in that industry," Wood says. "We're always going to be experimenting with Elevate. It's about trying new things. We're not always going to succeed, but most of the time, we find our best new things out of these attempts at trying new and different things." 🗣️

VROOOM!!!

Elevate 2024 will include an event at the NASCAR Hall of Fame. "Don't miss that, go see Jimmy Johnson, the King, Richard Petty and Dale Earnhardt," says Rocky Reynolds, Senix.

PHOTOS: NALP

What the locals told us

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"If you have a little religious bend, the Billy Graham library is absolutely great. The gardens are amazing. We don't take care of them, I wish we did. We tried to get that as an account, I think we came in second place. But this place should be on the top of your list."

"The Pump House is a restaurant at Riverwalk. It is amazing. It literally was a pump house back in the day, they made acetate. They converted it into a restaurant about a decade ago. It's Southern American food."

— **DAVID AMIGO, PRESIDENT, G&G LANDSCAPE SOLUTIONS**

"For an amazing dinner, check out Church and Union. Unbelievable atmosphere, service and food! The menu options are amazing and I've never had a bad experience there. I highly recommend the filet!"

— **ROCKY REYNOLDS, SENIX**

"For dinner, check out Link & Pin. There are three locations in Charlotte, but I'd recommend the South End one as that area is booming with so much entertainment and nightlife. It's also right off the Light Rail, which makes it appealing."

— **THOMAS LERVIK JR., FRIEND OF LM**

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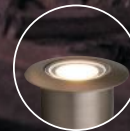
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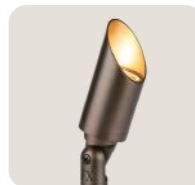
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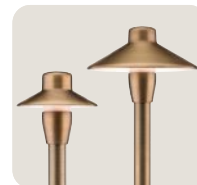
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Through its “Save Water, Give Life” initiative, Weathermatic directly links every product purchase to the gift of water through drilling clean water wells for communities in crisis.

Time for some **GOOD NEWS**



We all could use more good news. *LM* previews a new regular department for 2025 that will shine the spotlight on the great people doing good deeds in our industry

**BY SETH JONES
LM EDITORIAL DIRECTOR
AND SCOTT HOLLISTER
LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

In a recent meeting, Scott and I lamented how there seemed to be so many negative headlines in the news lately. As we were creating this issue, the aftermath of Hurricane Helene was in clear view, while the carnage created by Hurricane Milton was just in its beginning stages. Along with the hurricanes, there were wars overseas that showed few signs of slowing, and the next U.S. election was only weeks away, which meant the negative political ads were in full force.

In an effort to brighten things up a little, we decided to preview a fun new regular department set to debut in 2025, which will spotlight some of the good deeds, great people and positive stories going on in our industry on the regular.

*If you want to share your own story for “Time for Good News,” you know how to reach us. And trust us, we’re excited to hear — and share in the pages of *LM* — your good news. — S.J.*

Drilling deep for a good cause

Volunteers brought together by an industry heavyweight travel to Guatemala to help provide a small community with clean water

BY SETH JONES | LM EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

It is just in Weathermatic's DNA to care about water. The smart water technology company has worked alongside lawn care and landscape professionals since 1945, striving to save water while helping their customers grow their businesses.

About 15 years ago, Weathermatic decided to take their goodwill mission of saving water in a different direction: by using a portion of the company's sales to support impoverished communities worldwide and give them the gift of clean drinking water.

The "Save Water. Give Life" initiative joined Weathermatic and its customers with an international organization that connects volunteers with an experienced drilling crew to provide clean water to a community in need. Thanks to Weathermatic and its partners, Haiti now has 15 wells, Nicaragua has six and El Salvador four, among many more.

For safety reasons, the pandemic forced Weathermatic to push pause on the trip for the last few years. But this summer, the company was able to start up again with the good cause and assembled a crew of nine volunteers for a weeklong trip to Guatemala.

Joining representatives from Weathermatic were volunteers from Southern Botanical in Dallas and Outdoor Systems Management in Scottsdale, Ariz., as well as the Gachina brothers — Michael and Dominic of Gachina Landscape Management, a family-owned business servicing Northern California.

Michael Gachina, the business development manager and the health and safety manager for the company, says a number of reasons made him want to take the trip. Gachina is onboarding Weathermatic controllers into the company, so this was

a chance to get to know their representatives. He also hoped that after the trip was over, he and his brother could take some time off together to explore a new country. But the primary reason, he says, was this simply wasn't an opportunity that came around very often.

"It was a chance to go with my brother to another country and take some time off from work, and even though it was hard work, it's something that we could clear our minds from the family business for a little bit," Michael Gachina says. "We wanted to do a good thing. Having the opportunity to go into a less fortunate, impoverished community and build a well — but also go into the schools there and teach children about hygiene — seemed like a really awesome opportunity that doesn't come by every day."

A TRIBUTE TO BRODIE

Parry Webb, Weathermatic vice president, has been on this goodwill trip a half-dozen times or so. He says he and Brodie Bruner, the former executive vice president of Weathermatic, used to take turns. Bruner tragically passed away earlier this year.

"It's really been a way to honor (Bruner's) memory and the memory of a couple of others who have since passed away," Webb says. "It's become part of our core values here at Weathermatic. We hope to go again next spring."

The work itself is physical, Webb says, but the good news is the crew that joins the volunteers know what they're doing.



Not only did the Weathermatic team create a new well, but volunteers spent time teaching sanitation and hygiene workshops, building strong relationships along the way.

"The guys on the rigs are pretty professional. We're simply the muscle to get the drill rig in place," Webb says. "The segments of pipe, which are either 2 or 3 meters long, can be heavy. And we keep the drill rig running, moving a lot of dirt."

Dominic Gachina, who runs the company's San Jose location, says though he has plenty of experience in the landscaping industry, drilling a well was a completely new experience for him.

"It's labor-intensive, physical work," he says. "We ran into some

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trials and tribulations on the project. Our bit got stuck about 80 feet down. We had to get that drill unstuck, which meant we needed to physically take out every bit, piece by piece, then set up the new drill and get back on track.”

The day the drill bit was finally pried loose earned Dominic a new nickname among the crew and the locals who were anxiously watching the process: King Kong.

“They claim it was my brute strength that got the bit unstuck, but I think it was a group effort,” Dominic Gachina says with a laugh. “It was nice and endearing to get that nickname, but it was through teamwork and the Holy Spirit that we got that bit unstuck.”



Weathermatic and its partners have completed safe water projects in countries from El Salvador to Nicaragua and Sierra Leone.

FULFILLMENT OF A PRAYER

Providing clean water is only half of the mission of Save Water, Give Life. They also have a program for volunteers to visit a local school and, through a translator, talk to the kids about the importance of good hygiene and hand washing.

“The hygiene classes were so fun. The kids got so excited,” says Chantel Ortiz, Weathermatic’s director of implementation and customer success. “You really do get to form relationships. Kids don’t care what language you speak; they care that you care.”

“These weren’t small classrooms; it was a few hundred kids,” Michael Gachina adds. “And then you go back to the drill site, and some of the kids lived in the houses near where we were drilling. They’d come out, watch us work and hang out. It was a good opportunity to practice and use our Spanish.”

During the trip, the locals invited the volunteers to join them on a corn harvest so they could show them a drink they made. Then, the locals invited the crew into their homes.

“One of the most shockingly beautiful parts of the trip was when we showed up, (the locals) were so

PHOTO: WEATHERMATIC



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excited,” Ortiz says. “They were the ones who applied for the well. To have them be so warm and welcoming and excited ... these were women who were thinking about their children. It was the most beautiful thing.”

Webb says he'll fondly recall the children he met on the trip and playing soccer with them. But the most memorable part for him, he says, was

how important the well was to the adults in the village.

“It really is a humbling experience because a lot of these people have been praying for clean water all their lives — 60-, 70-year-old ladies who have prayed to God all their lives for clean water,” Webb says. “You’re representing the fulfillment of that prayer, so it can get pretty emotional.”

A veteran presence at Grounds Guys

A unique program that helps military veterans transition into business ownership has proven to be a win-win for company and owners alike **BY SCOTT HOLLISTER | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF**

Ken and Cori Bergeron own a Grounds Guys franchise in the Dallas suburb of Grapevine, Texas, that offers its customers a full slate of residential and commercial landscaping services. But that doesn't mean the couple always dreamed of a career in the green industry.

Their parents weren't in the landscape industry. They didn't grow up with their own lawn-mowing business or work summers toiling for a local lawn care company. It's not that they had anything against that kind of work, mind you. It's just that both of them were focused on other pursuits.

Namely, military service at the highest possible level they could achieve. Both Ken and Cori went to West Point, which is where they first met and were later married, the day after they graduated.

“Graduation was really the only time we were going to have both of our families together before we began our service, so it just made sense,” Cori Bergeron says about having two major life events on successive days.

Cori Bergeron went on to serve with the Army Corps of Engineers, while Ken Bergeron served in the Air Defense Artillery. Their service took the couple to points around the country and the globe — Kansas, Germany,

Central America, California — and they were rarely stationed anywhere near each other in the first part of their service and their marriage.

When they finally left active duty in 1990, they settled into what Ken Bergeron calls “the full corporate environment,” working in executive leadership roles and doing consulting work. But the couple has always had an entrepreneurial streak — while stationed at Fort Riley, Kan., the couple owned a restaurant in nearby Manhattan, Kan. — and were looking to write another chapter in their life, so they began looking into franchise opportunities.

Which brings us full circle to the world of landscaping and, ultimately, their partnership with Grounds Guys and that brand's parent company, Neighborly, which has an established track record of supporting military veterans and providing them a pathway into franchise ownership among its 19 different brands.

“We did a pretty thorough investigation of opportunities and looked at a lot of different brands,” Cori Bergeron says. “But we kept coming back to Grounds Guys and Neighborly. The more we looked, the more we knew that their model fit us. And with their support of veterans as franchise owners, it just made sense.”

Continued on page 20

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Continued from page 19

“Our experience has been that veterans do exceptionally well in a franchise model,” says Brian Wieters, Neighborly’s group vice president of franchise development. “They already understand how to follow a plan. They are trained on it, and they understand it inherently. And when things happen and that plan changes, they have the ability to adapt and overcome. Then there’s the whole sense of purpose, of working on something that’s bigger than themselves. All that lines up to give veterans like Ken and Cori a recipe for almost immediate success in this model.”

A HELPING HAND

That model didn’t come about by accident. It was all part of a plan

championed by the man who founded what would ultimately become the Neighborly collection of home services companies, Don Dwyer Sr., a veteran himself. At the time, five companies were under the umbrella of what was the Dwyer Group, and its founder wanted those companies to offer benefits to his fellow veterans.

“He wanted to do something for veterans as they were coming back home and transitioning out of active duty and into the workforce,” Wieters explains. “He decided to provide a discount to veterans that wanted to get into business and a plan to educate them on why business ownership could be really good for them as veterans.”

The plan paid off for both the veterans and the company, so much so that the International Franchise Association latched on to the idea and took Dwyer’s idea to the national level. Now, over 600 member companies participate in the IFA’s VetFran,



Neighborly, parent company of The Grounds Guys, offers franchise opportunities and financial incentives to honorably discharged Veterans.

an initiative that provides incentives, job placement, discounts at franchise companies and discounted membership for veterans interested in starting a franchise.

As the Dwyer Group transitioned into Neighborly, its own initiatives for veterans followed right along. The program offers veterans a set of tools, a structured path to ownership and a network of support that has ultimately attracted about 750 veteran franchise owners. Currently, over 400 individual franchises within Neighborly’s 19 brands are owned by veterans.

“When we look at the top performers in every brand, anywhere from 40 to 60 percent of our top 10 in each brand are owned by veterans,” Wieters says. “Because of what these veterans bring to the table and what we offer them in terms of support, that’s not a surprise to us.”

A MATCH MADE IN SERVICE

Thanks to their background and mindset, the Bergerons were immediately attracted to franchising as they began exploring new business opportunities.

“We’re both math people, engineers, so the numbers matter to us,” Ken Bergeron says. “And when you look at the math, most small businesses fail at a 50 percent rate within their first few years. Franchises survive at a much higher rate — something like 85 or 90 percent — and that really appealed to us.”

The model for veterans that Grounds Guys and Neighborly could offer and the successful track record

Continued on page 22

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Continued from page 20
that it had produced helped close the deal for them.

"My interest was in having a proven system and a set of tools that are there to help you," Ken Bergeron says. "You don't have to worry about back-office stuff, how we train our new team members and things like that. We were guided through all of



BRIAN WIETERS

that. Then there was the energy and the passion of everyone we spoke with. It was contagious." When you look at the numbers, it's obvious the Bergerons aren't the only ones to think that way. At the end of 2023, Wieters says roughly 15 percent of the 225 Grounds

Guys franchises in the United States were owned by veterans. Among the new franchisees that joined the Neighborly family in 2023 — a portfolio that includes the Mosquito Joe and Lawn Pride brands — 21 percent were veterans of the armed forces.

Those numbers are a source of pride for the Bergerons, who have still found a way to serve even though their active duty ended many years ago. Both serve in the Texas State Guard, a group tasked with providing first response and civil defense capabilities during natural disasters and emergencies in the state. Ken Bergeron is a brigade operations manager, while Cori Bergeron is a battalion commander, and their work has put the couple on the front lines of cleanup from recent hurricanes that have hit the Lone

SHARE YOUR STORY

We are excited to get the industry's support for our new regular department, "Time for Good News." If you have a story to share, email the team at *LM*, either Scott Hollister, Editor-in-Chief, shollister@northcoastmedia.net; or Seth Jones, Editorial Director, sjones@northcoastmedia.net.

Star State, among other things.

"It allows us to serve and continue to be a part of something," Ken Bergeron says.

That's not all that different from one of the couple's main takeaways from their ownership of a franchise and Neighborly's innovative support of military veterans.

"Most of the franchise opportunities we looked at had a formula and a way to help you get started, but we really examined how well the other owners work together to overcome challenges that aren't a part of that formula," Cori says. "No formula covers everything, so the network that we have now is just fantastic. The teamwork that was obvious among the owners — whether they are veterans or not — was something that was vitally important for us." 📧

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THE SURVEY SAYS ...


Guarded optimism about the future of the landscape industry is the prevailing view heading into 2025, according to the 2025 Aspire Landscape Industry Report

BY SCOTT HOLLISTER | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Landscape and lawn care companies are cautiously optimistic about 2025, according to the results of a recent survey by Aspire Software into industry trends and outlooks for the coming year.

Thirty-two percent of the more than 1,000 landscape professionals nationwide that Aspire surveyed indicated they expected their companies to perform better in 2025 than in 2024, with 56 percent saying they had a neutral outlook on the coming year. Compared to the economic uncertainty of recent years, the survey revealed that 2025 looks more balanced for commercial landscape contractors, even in the face of concerns about rising costs and staff shortages.

Aspire's survey also found that technology is helping many landscape companies overcome challenges and unlock growth opportunities. The increased technology adoption reflects a clear industry trend toward digital transformation and improved operational efficiencies.

Here are some additional key findings from Aspire's 2025 Landscape Industry Report, shared exclusively as part of a partnership between Aspire and *Landscape Management*. You can read the full report by scanning the QR code. 



24%

Landscape professionals who plan to **modernize** their customer experience in 2025

39%

Landscape professionals who believe the adoption of **artificial intelligence** (AI) can positively impact their field operations

With 32 percent of landscape professionals expecting better performance next year, the industry is poised for growth.





44%

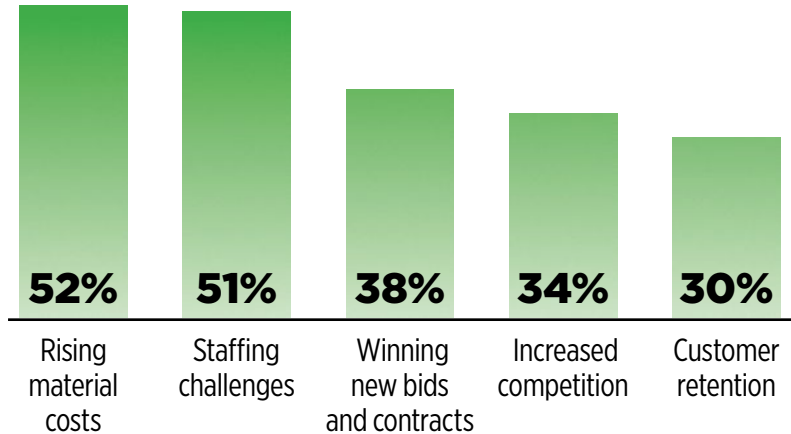
Landscape professionals who are forecasting **revenue increases** in 2025



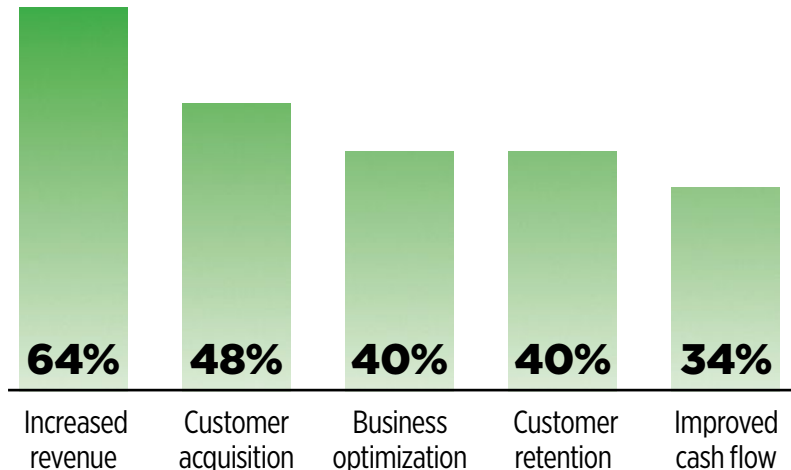
42%

Landscape professionals who say they experienced **revenue decreases** in 2024

BIGGEST RISKS FOR 2025



TOP BUSINESS GOALS FOR 2025



93%

Landscape professionals who use **software** in some capacity to manage their businesses

73%

Landscape professionals who consider **digital transformation** to be important to their business

14%

Landscape professionals who plan to **invest in technology** in 2025 to reach their annual goals

RECOMMENDER

They said it

We asked some of the most powerful players in the landscape and lawn care franchising industry a few burning questions. Here's what they told us

BY SETH JONES | LM EDITORIAL DIRECTOR



Q: What does it take to make it in the industry?

"I'll be straight up: You need to enjoy managing some level of what I call chaos. That's a negative word, but we deal with weather, we deal with small tools and equipment, we deal with employees, we deal with customers. If you don't enjoy moving those pieces around on the chessboard, if you don't enjoy waking up and saying, 'I'm going to control what I can control,' if you can't manage those unexpected things, then you know what? You probably shouldn't own any kind of a business — stay in that cubicle."

KEN HUTCHESON
PRESIDENT, U.S. LAWNS



Q: Where do you foresee the future of private equity investment in the lawn care market?

"I've been following it since private equity jumped into the pest control world almost 10 years ago. We see that there's three or four primary private equity players moving into the green space, and that's going to consolidate down to three. And that consolidation is already beginning. Eventually, there will probably be two or three primary private equity folks that are going to continue to consolidate. I think it's a great thing for our industry because it's bringing in so much talent, and we're seeing a lot of these companies really become better businesses that do lawn care versus really good lawn care companies that are growing at business. I think the business acumen is growing."

ROB PALMER
PRESIDENT, LAWN SQUAD
(PART OF PRIVATE EQUITY-BACKED AUTHORITY BRANDS)



Q: How do you feel about the future of the lawn care business?

"I'll dissect that a little bit for the Grounds Guys that has been, over the last few years, one of our fastest growing businesses here. We love the upside. We love people thinking about investing in their homes, thinking about having the outdoor space be more than just a place where you walk through. It's a place where you want to live, right? You want to beautify that area. The Grounds Guys want to be a part of that. We're really finding great profitable services to go after in that space. And we think that's a major growth area. The growth in that space in general is relatively untapped."

JOSH SEVIK
GROUP PRESIDENT,
NEIGHBORLY, THE GROUNDS
GUYS AND LAWN PRIDE



Q: What is the best advice you've been given that you always try to abide by?

"Listen so you can have thoughtful inputs, whether it be an issue, idea or a thought. If you don't listen, you start working on the wrong problems. This is something I've always held true all through my career: master the art of listening and hearing what is being said."

JENNIFER LEMCKE
CEO, WEED MAN



Q: What is your favorite magazine in the industry?

"That's easy. I know personally, when I first started the business and got into this thing, I relied heavily on *Landscape Management* magazine for everything from the how-tos to the different columns that are in there: weed identification, insect identification, marketing and advertising. You guys really have done well over the years with educating and teaching and training the industry and the owner. I applaud you."

JOSH WISE
CEO, GRASSROOTS TURF

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A helpful guide to eliminating chinch bugs

BY NATHAN MADER
LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR



A classic self-care tip these days is to cut toxicity from your life, and in the landscaping industry, that can be taken literally.

First up on the chopping block are chinch bugs (*Blissus leucopertus*), a pesky insect found throughout most of North America that feeds on turf and literally attacks it with toxins designed to clog vascular tissues and block water and food from moving throughout the plant.

Chinch bugs most often come in one of two variants, with the common chinch bug being found anywhere from the Midwest and western U.S. down to Virginia and Georgia. The hairy chinch bug has some overlap with the common variant but also can cause havoc in northern states and into Canada.

In these areas, chinch bugs will devour many kinds of turfgrasses, including Kentucky bluegrass, fescues, perennial ryegrass, bentgrass, zoysiagrass, St. Augustinegrass and more.

X MARKS THE SPOT

Craig Zeigler, president and owner of Agronomic Lawn Management in Chesapeake, Va., says chinch bugs are tiny — only a few millimeters to a fifth of an inch long — meaning identifying them is tricky.

“You have to look pretty quick when you’re looking for them. You pull the turfgrass layer open, and they move really quick down into the thatch layer,” Zeigler says. “They really like excessive thatch.”

Chinch bugs are thin and defined by a white, almost X-like pattern on their back. Zeigler says they can also be spotted running along driveways or sidewalks if the damaged turf is nearby.

Hot, dry conditions and direct sunlight are also key environmental factors for chinch bugs to thrive in. As a result, they’ll typically avoid shaded areas, and damage that ends at or borders shade lines can be used as an extra clue.

CONTROL THE PROBLEM

Chinch bug damage can occur throughout the summer and even into September, and it often gets confused for drought stress due to it happening in the hot, sunny months. Zeigler says turf will turn yellow and brown before dying, and the turf will become brittle due to the bugs’ constant feeding.

Another mistake that can promote chinch bug infestations is overfertilization. Chinch bugs thrive in excess thatch, and fertilizing too much often doesn’t give the thatch enough time to decompose, leading to buildup.

“Some guys will fertilize extra because it looks greener, but then you get the

issues where you’ll get that thatch buildup,” Zeigler says. “That’s just inviting them to come in, make it home, and they can feed off that plant.”

That’s why Zeigler recommends proper turf maintenance as one of the best ways to prevent these pests. Proper fertilization, summer aeration and verticutting are just some of the practices Zeigler says can keep turf healthy and resistant to chinch bug invasions.

And while Zeigler usually uses chemical controls for chinch bugs as a reactionary treatment, he says imidacloprid insecticide can be used as a preemergent. Once they take root, however, Zeigler uses bifenthrin to get rid of them without too much hassle.

“We’ve always treated it with bifenthrin,” he says. “When you do get (chinch bugs), it’s like you treat them and they just kind of go away, and then the plant will recover. But if it goes untreated, it can kill the turf.”

END THE CYCLE
Chinch bugs often have a white stripe as a nymph that becomes an X as an adult.

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THE BIG ONE

Everything's bigger in Texas

BY NATHAN MADER
LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

LOCATION Dallas, Texas

COMPANY Southern Botanical, Inc.

DETAILS If everything is bigger in Texas, then that for sure includes the landscaping.

Take for example Southern Botanical's North Dallas Residence project, a large operation that started with a landscape installation at this newly built home and has only grown and evolved since 2011 through continuous maintenance.

Bringing the client's vision to life and maintaining the intent of the original landscape design were two important goals, but a freeze a few years ago caused a significant dent in that plan. A large portion of the landscape was killed, meaning replacing plants and improving the design.

Due to supply and demand issues, replanting vegetation such as azaleas, *Pyracantha*, *Elaeagnus* and *Abelia* wasn't easy. Other parts of the property also received a face lift, such as the color beds and garden.

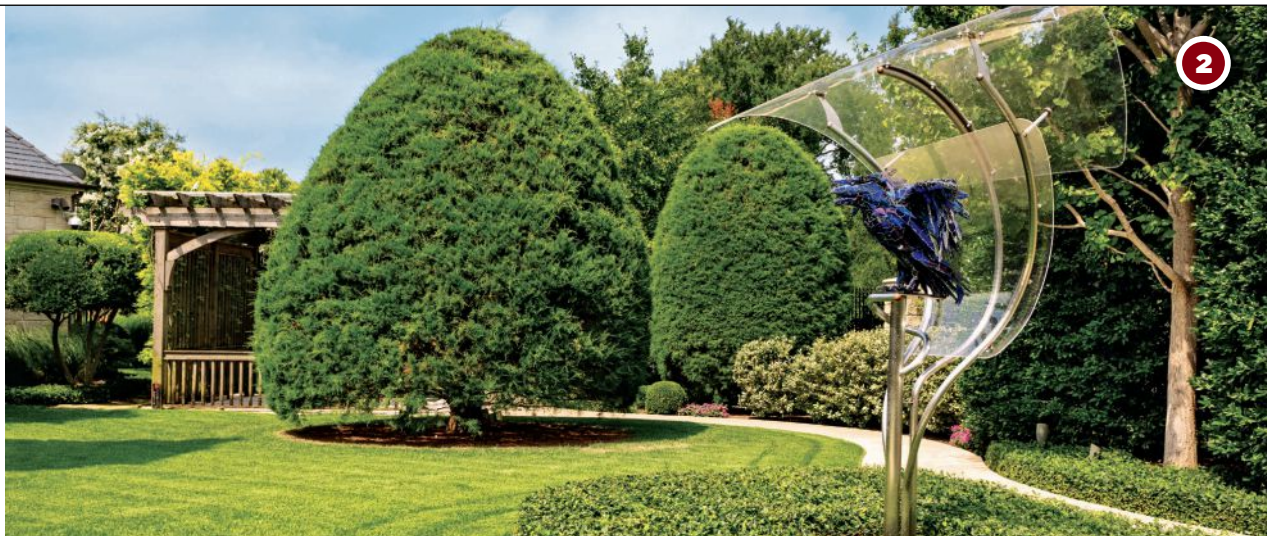
So, with life restored and the original design upgraded, maintenance nowadays sees weekly garden service, weekly boxwood and yaupon globe pruning during the growing season, mowing, annual turf aeration, tree pruning and more.

Southern Botanical won a gold 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.



PHOTOS: SOUTHERN BOTANICAL



Captions | **1.** Water features play a crucial role in the aesthetic of the landscape, and pockets of perennials throughout the gardens can create a safe haven for pollinators. **2.** The Raven Statue was recently installed, requiring a special solution and cloth to avoid scratching and discoloration during weekly cleaning. **3.** The sheared cedar trees and hollies are designed to be anchors along the winding path that meanders through the expanded garden. **4.** After the Texas freeze that killed a large portion of the landscape, Southern Botanical worked with the client to replant and upgrade while still maintaining the integrity of the original design. **5.** More depth was recently added to the seasonal color beds to bring the client's vision of a cheerful, welcoming environment at the home's entrance to life. **6.** The greenhouse is important for the landscape as an interior fountain controls humidity levels and freeze-sensitive plants like sago palms are moved inside during the winter months. **7.** Japanese maples are the client's favorite tree, so one was added amongst the newly designed and planted bed to achieve additional height. **8.** The wisteria covered gazebo is carefully maintained to avoid wood damage. Blooming can be enjoyed in the spring from the upper terrace and the sitting area in the gazebo.

BUSINESS BOOSTERS

Practice makes perfect

With labor at the top of mind for landscape business owners, software companies step up to speed the process up

BY ROB DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

As the labor pool continues to contract, training new hires without green industry experience quickly is more important than ever for landscape business owners.

“The traditional method is on-the-job training. So, you hire someone, you put them on a crew on Monday and you hope it works out. Now, (business owners) have a lot more strategy to that approach,” says Matt Crinklaw, senior vice president of Greenius.

Crinklaw shares how green industry business owners can leverage business software to get new hires up and running with confidence

WHY NOT?

Making sure your employees are properly trained is a crucial part of running a successful business. Crinklaw says

he’s heard that from many green industry contractors, both personally and from surveys that Greenius has conducted.

“It’s so important,” he says. “We sent out a survey to a

lot of our landscape contractors, and 78 percent of them said that training is a huge priority going forward and something they really want to do.”

So, why haven’t many of those contractors started making moves toward building a training program? Crinklaw says it comes down to the time and energy it takes to set up your own training program.



New software options can help make training your employees more efficient.

That’s where businesses like Greenius come into play, he says.

“We can say, ‘Hey, you can meet with us in an hour and get this off the ground.’ We don’t need a two- or three-month rollout. We only need a few hours. And then you have this full out-of-the-box training program that allows you to really start changing processes really fast,” Crinklaw adds.

BUILD YOUR OWN

One of Greenius’ newer features allows contractors to get even more granular with their training programs.

“We recently added a course builder tool, which allows customers to add their training now, so if people have their videos or ways of doing it, they can add it to our system,” Crinklaw says.

Greenius has also begun to partner with equipment manufacturers in the green industry to add tutorials on using their equipment to the software.

“Recently, we connected with Toro Equipment, so we can offer a bunch of their training in Greenius. We’re also working with Weathermatic to get some

irrigation training into our system, so we’re trying to expand our library by a solid 10 to 20 percent.”

OUTSIDE THE BOX

Another option, used by companies like Conserva Irrigation, No. 85 on the 2024 LM150 list, involves working with a company outside of the green industry.

Conserva’s 22-module-long program helps new employees learn irrigation fundamentals and aims to have new hires field-ready within 45 to 60 days.

At the time, the program’s opening module introduced the new hire to Conserva and its ideals. Other modules focused on sales techniques, leadership training and communication.

“This has allowed us to widen the recruiting nets and look outside our industry for talent,” Russ Jundt told LM in 2022, shortly after the program launched. “We can hire based on the most important human aspects (work ethic, culture fit, coachability) and train the skill sets necessary. This is a game changer. We sell our ability to train and develop employees and help them build a career.”



Matt Crinklaw



BUILDING A FOUNDATION FOR GROWTH

Contractors laud software that's built with efficiency and scalability in mind for both landscape maintenance and construction businesses

The team members at Alpine Gardens in Ft. Collins, Colo., have been constructing a full-service landscape company from the ground up since the late 1970s. Today, second-generation owner Nate Fetig and his wife, Heidi, run a nearly \$12 million operation with about 100 employees.

The company does both landscape maintenance and design/build and installation, and has an approximately 50/50 residential-to-commercial mix.

In Fetig's experience, building a foundation for growth in the landscape industry starts with solid systems, good people and knowledge about benchmarks and key performance indicators (KPIs). Success would not be possible in any of these areas without powerful software to bring it all together, he says.

Alpine Gardens began using Aspire in 2016, when the company was about \$7 million, after using spreadsheets and manual processes for decades.

"Things were pretty chaotic without having some kind of centralized software to keep us organized and accountable," says Fetig. "I hear from a lot of other contractors that software is expensive and that's why they're avoiding it. It is a pretty significant investment, but you're going to hit a point where you can't continue to grow without making that investment."

Mark Stephens, managing partner for Stephens Landscaping in Moultonborough, N.H., has



NATE FETIG



MARK STEPHENS

a similar perspective. His company has used software from the beginning in 2007, although he and his team used to operate with two separate software programs side by side.

He says he discounted Aspire early on because it was significantly more expensive than what the company had been using. In 2017, he knew he had to make the move to a system like Aspire that was specifically designed to support companies as they grew.

“As we wanted to continue to scale, we needed to be on a software that was scalable as well,” he says. Before joining Aspire, Stephens Landscaping did approximately \$7 million to \$8 million in annual revenue.

“This year, we’ll do \$20 million, and I attribute a lot of that to Aspire,” Stephens says. “Everyone is on the same page, we’ve added three to five points to the bottom line, and it’s not stressful to bring on a new sales person or account manager.”

Both Alpine Gardens and Stephens Landscaping do a mix of maintenance and design/build and construction. Aspire has long focused on commercial maintenance, but this year began rolling out construction enhancements that both Fetig and Stephens are excited about.

A Blueprint for Construction Enhancements

Since it was founded in 2013, Aspire has always been capable of supporting landscape contractors’ design/build and construction businesses, although traditionally it has been best suited for managing maintenance operations.

As part of the company’s evolution, bolstered by a bump in landscape construction work during the COVID-19 pandemic, Aspire committed to improving its construction feature set.

“The pandemic was hard; it was scary for a while, but it blew the doors wide open for landscape construction,” says Whitney Griffin, senior product owner at Aspire. “Now that the economy has shifted and everyone is building again, our customers, even ones that have historically not stepped foot in the construction space, are starting to offer bid/build and/or design/build services.

We want to be the only solution they need.”

With that mindset, Aspire set out to remove “friction points” for its construction users, Griffin says.

Aspire CEO Mark Tipton explains further. “We’ve always had some construction



WHITNEY GRIFFIN

capability, and the need for it has been growing,” he says. “As we looked at the market, we could make our customers a lot happier and we could grow more by moving in this direction, so those conversations started about three years ago.”



MARK TIPTON

The Aspire team began outlining an approach and collecting feedback. A major part of the effort was creating client advisory groups for different focus areas, such as design/build and bid/build, which helped the team prioritize the software’s enhancements and shape their functionality. “Those client advisors are invaluable,” Tipton says. “It gets us back to our roots. That’s how we started Aspire — sitting down with a group of contractors and asking, ‘What do we need to make Aspire do? How should it work?’ It gave me great confidence that what we were doing was going to be on target.”

Aspire Construction Enhancements — Explained

Most of the items on the construction roadmap are improvements to existing functionality, Griffin says. Several are new features. Here are just a few of the enhancements she says landscape contractors are looking forward to the most.

Open billing: Aspire has always allowed open billing, but now users can bill by a percentage, dollar

amount or with increased granularity, if desired.

Invoicing flexibility: Soon, users will have the ability to complete invoice revisions in closed months that still follow accounting best practices.

Equipment scheduling: Aspire now allows scheduling of shared equipment assets, such as skid-steer loaders and other construction tools.

Project management: Another key improvement for landscape construction divisions is expanded, interactive Gantt chart functionality, including the ability to add milestones and tasks.

Work-in-Progress (WIP) reporting: New WIP reporting capabilities include filtering and comparing current and prior billing periods.

Dynamic forecasting: Aspire’s new dynamic forecasting tool auto-populates sold construction revenue, so users can assess their future workloads and labor needs.

Estimate revisions: Early next year, Aspire users will be able to create multiple estimates for a single opportunity.

Submittals management: Coming soon, the software will log every action Aspire users and customers take, creating a dual-sided digital “paper” trail.

“By removing some of these friction points that have existed in construction, our goal is to make things better for our users and give people more time back in their day,” Griffin says.

Contractors’ Take

Fetig is most excited about the equipment scheduling function. It will be a huge improvement over the magnetic board his team currently uses, he says.

“It will really help us get a handle on how we’re allocating our resources and become more efficient in moving equipment around from site to site,” he says. “It’s going to increase visibility and allow us to share equipment across different divisions. (Currently) we probably end up renting more equipment than we need to.”

Fetig also appreciates Aspire’s new vendor management tools. “Now, you can assign a vendor to a material in the estimating process,



so by the time it gets to the purchasing person, they know where it's supposed to be coming from," he says. "You still have the opportunity to shop around and get the best deal, but it's a really big time-saver (for the purchasing department) and eliminates possible miscommunication or ordering from the wrong place. It's a pretty simple change, but it's made a pretty big impact right off the bat."

Stephens is also excited about the ability to assign vendors at the estimate level, in addition to item catalog price overrides, which he says allow for quick changes for custom products or items not in your catalog.

Scheduling-wise, he calls the upgraded Gantt charts "super helpful to give us a quick overview of where we are headed and where we should be headed."

Stephens is also looking forward to the new WIP reporting capabilities.

"You're not waiting until the end of the job to realize 'We're way behind on profitability,'" he says. "That way you can adjust."

What's Next?

Going forward, the industry can expect more investment from Aspire around helping contractors be more efficient and grow, according to Tipton.

"Efficiency has always been the foundational thing Aspire was built on," he says. "Now, as part of the influence of ServiceTitan (which acquired Aspire in 2021), we rolled out a product called Marketing Pro, an automation tool that lets you reach out to prospects and exiting customers, whether you're focused on upsells or winning new business."

ServiceTitan also recently acquired a business called Convex, which helps commercial contractors find and engage with prospective clients, he adds. Early adopters leveraging Convex with Aspire and PropertyIntel are already seeing drastic improvements in close rate.

Join Aspire CEO Mark Tipton and Senior Product Owner Whitney Griffin as they detail the company's expanded construction toolset in an on-demand webinar, "Building Better with Aspire: Streamline Construction Operations for Higher Profits."



Aspire Software, a ServiceTitan company, offers business management software built specifically for companies in the landscape, commercial cleaning, and paving industries. Aspire makes a real difference in customers' lives with cloud-based solutions that offer the end-to-end functionality contractors need to gain full visibility into their business, make better decisions, and increase profit margins. For more information, visit youraspire.com.

HIGH AND (NOT) DRY
Watering your trees late in the season is an important part of making sure they stay healthy throughout the winter.



PREVENTATIVE MEDICINE

Not all steps landscape contractors can take require trimming or, in extreme cases, contracting with a professional tree service to manage the issue. Meyer says that focusing on the overall health of the tree can pay dividends now and when the snow clears in spring.

“Fall is a great time to set trees up for next season,” he says. “We recommend a deep fertilization for shrubs and trees at this time of year. To do that, we use a probe that goes into the ground 8-10 inches and is connected to a tanker truck full of tree food. When you squeeze the trigger, you’re delivering that food directly to the roots of the plant.”

Mulching is another beneficial step, Meyer says, because it can improve moisture retention and gradually provide trees with important nutrients as the mulch breaks down throughout the winter.

And even though it might seem counterintuitive to some, Meyer says watering is as important late in the season as it is during the spring and summer.

“People think that spring and summer are over, so they don’t need to water anymore,” he says. “But that’s not the case. Trees are still growing. They stop the shoot growth and stop growing above ground, but they start putting in their root growth and storing sugars in their roots. It’s really important to keep the roots damp throughout the year, at least until the first frost.” 🌳

MAINTAIN YOUR EDGE

Safety first: Tips for ensuring safe, healthy trees

Experts say taking common-sense steps to assess trees will pay off now and when spring rolls around

BY SCOTT HOLLISTER | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

As fall gives way to winter and landscape crews make their final visits to the properties under their care, tree experts encourage them to spend as much time looking up at the trees on those properties as they are looking down at the turf and landscaping beds.

That’s because this time of year is perfect for assessing the current health and safety of those trees and taking steps that can help prevent problems once spring rolls around again.

“This time of year, it can be a little more difficult for a layperson to discern hazards because many trees are dropping leaves, so dead spots are harder to make out,” says Lou Meyer, a certified arborist for Davey Tree who works in the Mid-Atlantic region. “But most



Lou Meyer

landscapers are experienced enough to assess trees, identify potential trouble spots and know what work they can do and what work needs to go to a professional arborist. Doing that now can save lots of headaches down the road.”

EASY DOES IT

Meyer suggests landscape contractors and lawn care operators start simple when assessing trees for any possible warning signs. “Anything that looks like it could fall from the sky and potentially hurt someone on the ground should be the first thing you note,” he says.

Not all of those are obvious from the ground; buds or flowers making an appearance at the wrong time of year or fungi and algae that might be the first sign of tree decay are often hard to spot without a close inspection, Meyer says. That doesn’t mean he’s encouraging crews to begin tree-climbing expeditions or bring in extra equipment that would allow them to get a better look.

“I carry a pair of binoculars most of the time, but they’re especially useful at this time of year,” he says. “It’s going to allow you a better look at things and help landscapers make more informed decisions about what additional steps might be needed.”

Meyer also says that not all hazards are created equal and that location is a critical factor in how landscapers should approach them.

“A target has to be present for it to be a true hazard,” Meyer says. “If you find a tree with dead spots or disease in the back 40 where no one ever goes, it’s much less of a concern than if a dead limb is over a driveway or a patio. Those high-frequency, high-traffic target areas are where you should really be focused.”

Meyer also says that now is the time to study trees that sit close to houses, office buildings or garages to ensure they have the proper clearance to handle any snow or ice loads they might encounter during winter.

“Branches that are only 3-5 feet above a building are going to be on top of that building with any significant snow or ice,” he says. “You want to get at least 5-8 feet of clearance in those situations before winter sets in.”

HARDSCAPE SOLUTIONS

From dusk till dawn

BY ROB DIFRANCO
LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

LOCATION Cherry Hills Village, Colo.

COMPANY Designs by Sundown

DETAILS Designs by Sundown had plenty of space to work with in this suburban Denver backyard.

The client, a family of six, wanted their backyard space to have a pool as well as a dining area that was not only connected but also distinctly separate.

The most pressing challenge for the designer was a dramatic grade change from the patio to the back fence. The contractor addressed this with several retaining walls separating the main patio from the swimming pool.

The designer used several ambient lighting pieces to light the space, including hanging lanterns, under-the-stair lights, bistro lighting and wall sconces.

Designs by Sundown utilized local Colorado Loveland buff stone and Belgard pavers, with custom furniture designed by an in-house team. Other features of the project include an artificial turf area for the client's children to practice sports, a bar and a chicken coop.

Designs by Sundown won a silver award from the NALP Awards of Excellence program for this project. 🏆

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



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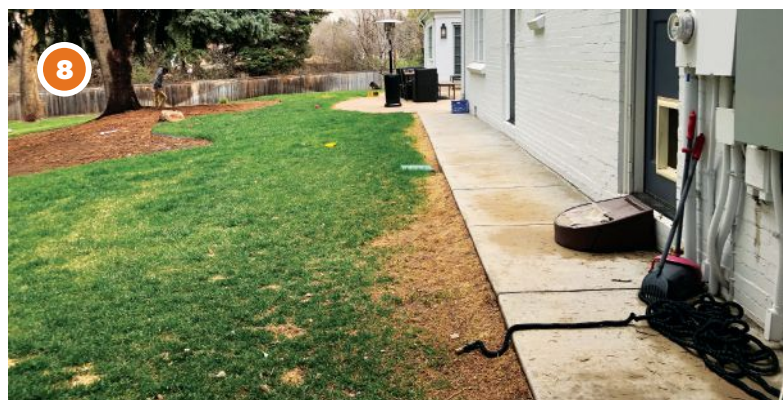
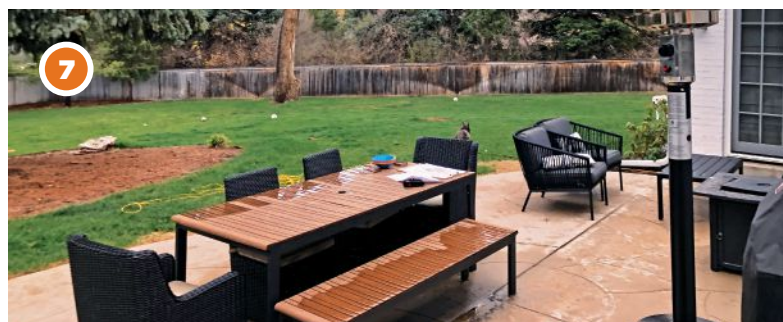


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6

PHOTOS: DESIGNS BY SUNDOWN



1. The fireplace serves as the centerpiece and anchor of all the additional spaces. **2.** To create the illusion of separate rooms, the designer installed a fireplace, which also serves as a backdrop for the family's outdoor living area. **3.** The connected pergola was a challenge for the contractor, as the client wanted it to extend seamlessly from the home without darkening the interior. **4.** Designs by Sundown's in-house outdoor furniture department designed and installed all the furniture and accessories. This collaboration allowed all departments to work together in every space. **5.** The contractor also installed this artificial turf area so the client's four children could practice lacrosse and soccer year-round. **6.** Near the back of the project, the family included a chicken coop to provide a farmhouse touch to their suburban home. **7.** A before photo shows off the large canvas Designs by Sundown had to work with, and the grade change that presented a challenge. **8.** Another before photo gives a better look at the sloped backyard.

BUSINESS BOOSTERS

One size fits all

How compact utility tractors can punch way above their weight

BY NATHAN MADER | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

As technology improves, the machines and tools landscapers use on job sites continue to become more detailed and niche. Nowadays, it seems like there's a different tool designed to do every hyper-specific job one can think of.

But while some machines focus on getting better at just one specific task, compact utility tractors are taking another approach: getting better at almost every task.

"We have over 20 compact tractor models at John Deere," Mark Davey, manager of marketing at John Deere, says. "They're in that small, compact design of a compact tractor, of course, to be able to do a lot of work and still be light to get around on turf and just be able to maneuver in and out of tight spaces really well."

JUST HOW YOU LIKE IT

So, what exactly makes compact tractors so versatile? Well, Jon Richardson, director of the Yanmar America Rural Lifestyle Division, says it all lies in the attachments and implements, something Yanmar has tons of for its machines to match a wide variety of landscaping needs.

"By allowing a single machine to perform multiple tasks — such as digging, mowing, grading and material handling — attachments like loaders, backhoes and tillers eliminate the need for hauling multiple pieces of equipment to a job," Richardson says. "This flexibility increases efficiency, reduces costs and minimizes job site downtime by enabling landscape contractors to adapt to different tasks."

Tyler Weyenberg, Kubota product manager for utility tractors, says the wide array of attachments and machines gives landscapers more control over their jobs, allowing them to get more parts of a task done all without needing to leave the cab. And because these machines can work in all seasons, being able to stay inside away from a harsh winter breeze can feel like a lifesaver.

Plus, Davey says some attachments can even serve multiple purposes, such as John Deere's spreaders being capable of spreading salt in the winter and fertilizer during other seasons. Ease of use is also crucial, and all three companies have their own quick-connect systems to help operators seamlessly transition between jobs and attachments.

"A vast variety of quick connect solutions is what we focus on," Davey says. "We build them to go on and off the tractor very quickly so that if you're a landscaper and you're looking to be able

to move between properties and to do a large variety of tasks, it's super easy to do that the way we design these to come on and off the tractor very quickly."

HERE TO HELP

With hundreds of front, mid and rear implements, compact tractors can sometimes be an overwhelming opportunity to pursue. However, once a contractor knows what jobs they need fulfilled, they can reach out to dealers to ask questions, explore options and sometimes get to test drive machines.

"Once you know what attachments you plan to use, you can work with your local dealer to properly spec the machine so that it can successfully run all of them," Weyenberg says.

Virtual innovation is also a big goal for many companies, and Davey says the option to connect new and select tractor models via Bluetooth to a smartphone allows operators to see their hours worked and even set up maintenance schedules as they use their machine.

"Being able to see all that type of stuff to really stay up on the maintenance of the machine, to really keep it operating in tip top shape, is a really cool kind of new feature over the last few years," Davey says. 📱



HEAVY HITTER

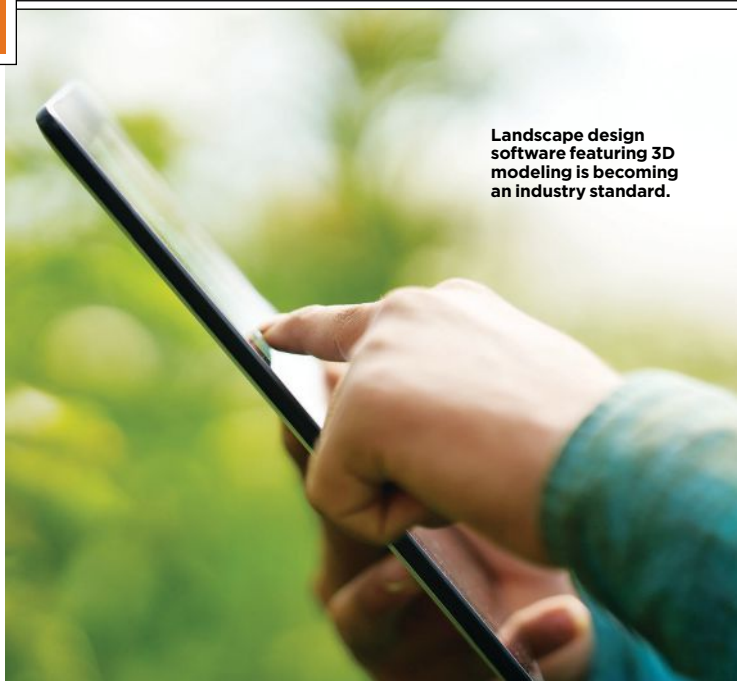
A compact utility tractor's small size doesn't stop it from moving big loads on a job site.



PARTY IN THE BACK
Attachments can often fit in the front, middle and back of a compact utility tractor.

RECOMMENDER

What **landscape design software** do you use, and what **features** help you the most in your job?



Landscape design software featuring 3D modeling is becoming an industry standard.



JOSHUA P. RICHARDSON, CPP
LANDSCAPE DESIGNER
RUPPERT LANDSCAPE
NEW HILL, N.C.

“We don’t have a one-stop shop for the software we use, but we really lean into the DynaScape package, DynaScape Design and DynaScape Color. They have all the normal features that AutoCAD would have ... but they’ve added preset libraries for things like shrubs, plants, hardscape features and structures. When I learned how to do design work, I learned through hand drawings and renderings, which was valuable. But with the software we have available to us now and the flexibility it allows us, digital is the way to go.”



STEVEN CARROLL
LEAD DESIGNER
GREENWAY LANDSCAPE
DESIGN & BUILD
SAN DIEGO

“We’re using Structure Studio’s VIP3D package, which sort of bundles their landscaping software with their Pool Studio product. It’s a really versatile tool, from roughing things out quickly to much more advanced designs. And you can make design changes on the fly instead of going through multiple revisions with a customer, which is what we used to have to do. We’re able to make photo-realistic changes for customers in just a few clicks. It’s really revolutionized the whole process.”



MIKE MCCARRON
OWNER
IMAGE WORKS
LANDSCAPING
FAIRFAX STATION, VA.

“We’re using DynaScape for all our high-end work, basically any work that requires permitting. It does all your multi-layering — your plants, your hardscapes, your storm-water management, your non-impervious surfaces, your turf, your trees and shrubs. You can easily move through layers to show what you need to as a part of more complex projects that require permitting. For stuff that doesn’t rise to that level, we still rely on Pro Landscapes, which is super easy to learn and put into use if you have a smaller staff or are just getting started in this space.”



RONG RONG
DIRECTOR OF
LANDSCAPE
ARCHITECTURE
CURBS STUDIO
WELLESLEY HILLS, MASS.

“When I first started, we did a lot of hand sketches for the concept design, then we moved those into software using AutoCAD, Rhinoceros 3D for 3D modeling. You had to work between softwares. But then I learned about Vectorworks, which is what we use now. It combines 3D modeling, 2D plan design software and various libraries for things like plantings and furniture. The software allows you to work with the exact dimensions of the space you’re working and the different features, which is all super helpful.”

IRRIGATION SHOW PREVIEW

IrrigationShow
and Education Week

LONG
BEACH,
CA

Innovation, instruction in the spotlight at 2024 Irrigation Show

The annual event hits Long Beach, Calif., Nov. 4-7, offering attendees a blend of education, exhibits and networking

BY SCOTT HOLLISTER | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

When the doors swing open for the 2024 Irrigation Show, Nov. 4-7 in Long Beach, Calif., the industry's best and brightest practitioners and the companies that support them won't be the only ones taking in the spectacle.

There will also be a host of staff members from local water and conservation agencies on hand who ply their trade in a region where water quality and availability are paramount.

"When we're in a place like Long Beach, we're able to highlight our industry's innovation and the things we bring to the table to solve the challenges around water," says Nathan Bowen, the advocacy and public affairs vice president for the Irrigation Association, which puts on the annual water-focused conference and trade show.

"When we come to Southern California or places in the Southwest, we

always see a large number of municipal water agencies and conservation staffs who can come to the show and benefit from not just the education that is offered, but they get to see firsthand some of the technological solutions that they might not have been aware of.

"It's exciting to us that we're able to attract not only industry professionals, contractors and manufacturers, but also other key audiences and local decision-makers."

What will the assembled professionals — including a host from the landscape industry — discover this year during their time at the Long Beach Convention & Entertainment Center? Bowen says the event's usual mix of top-notch education, an exhibit floor filled with the latest and greatest tools in the industry and a host of networking and social events will all be front and center, with a few new twists mixed in for good measure.

SHOWING OFF

Bowen says this year's trade show floor will feature more than 200 exhibitors representing over 100 irrigation product categories. The show will be the feature event on both Wednesday, Nov. 6 (10 a.m. to 5 p.m.) and Thursday, Nov. 7 (10 a.m. to 4 p.m.).

"Spending time on the show floor is really an opportunity to learn about the level of innovation in the irrigation industry," Bowen says. "You're going to learn about solutions that solve complicated problems for society ... that help ensure global food security and thriving, healthy communities."

That innovation will be front and center in the Innovation Hub and on Innovation Row on the trade show floor, designated areas dedicated to startup companies and presentations highlighting the latest trends and advancements in irrigation. Attendees can also check out new products entering the irrigation and landscape lighting markets through the New Product Contest Showcase. The contest winners will be announced during the General Session on Nov. 7.

CLASS IS IN SESSION

The learning and discovery that's at the core of the Irrigation Show's exhibit floor jump to another level with the educational opportunities available in Long Beach Nov. 4-6, most notably IA University, the core curriculum for irrigation professionals.

Tailored for professionals with varied levels of irrigation

SHOWTIME
The trade show at the 2024 Irrigation Show will feature more than 200 exhibitors.



PHOTOS: IRRIGATION ASSOCIATION; ILLUSTRATION: ABERB4 / ISTOCK / GETTY IMAGES PLUS / GETTY IMAGES

experience and in sectors ranging from agriculture to landscape and golf, the bulk of these sessions are offered annually, but five new classes will be available this year.

The classes offered focus on real-world applications and case studies and teach current techniques and best practices that result in proven results, all led by instructors with industry expertise and previous teaching experience. These sessions are priced separately, and attendees must be registered for the Irrigation Show to participate.

“The education and training offered at the Irrigation Show really advance the professionalism of the industry at large but also an individual’s professional development and career advancement goals,” Bowen says. “It’s an opportunity for an individual to invest in their career.”

In addition to the paid IA University options, the show also offers its Industry Insights program, learning opportunities included with registration. A wide range of topics will be featured, from staff development to irrigation wire diagnostics and the role of artificial intelligence in the green industry.

MAKING CONNECTIONS

In addition to expanding attendees’ knowledge at the Irrigation Show, the event also offers plenty of opportunities to expand their professional networks, as well ... and even have a little fun along the way.

For those attending the Irrigation Show for the first time, Bowen says the First-Timers Roundtable on Tuesday, Nov. 5, is a must-attend event.

“We really do value the connections that can be forged at the Irrigation Show, so we wanted to create an opportunity that makes it easy for our newcomers to do that,” he says. “The First-Timers Roundtable is a chance to meet others who are going through the experience for the first time, but also connect with people who have attended for a long time and can offer



LEANING INTO LEARNING Hands-on opportunities and panel discussions will be among the educational offerings available during the 2024 Irrigation Show in Long Beach, Calif.

their insights and expertise about how to get the most out of the event.

“It’s always nice when you’re doing something new to have someone in the same boat as you, and so this is an opportunity to meet people who are in a similar place as you are.”

Other networking events for specific groups that Bowen encourages attendees to put at the top of their list are the Young Professionals Social — a networking happy hour for irrigation or lighting professionals under the age of 40 — on Tuesday, Nov. 5, and the Women in Irrigation Breakfast on Wednesday, Nov. 6, which will spotlight women working to make a difference in irrigation and landscape lighting.

Finally, a trip to the Irrigation Show wouldn’t be complete without a chance to relax and unwind with colleagues from around the industry, and two events in Long Beach fit that bill this year — the Pacific Coast Party on Wednesday, Nov. 6 and the Craft Brewfest on Thursday, Nov. 7.

“Networking and meeting people doesn’t just happen at formal events, so these social events are a great way

to continue doing that but in a different environment,” Bowen says. “I know I’m looking forward to both the Pacific Coast Party and the Craft Brewfest, and I think they’ll be great events whether this is your first Irrigation Show or you’ve been many times.”

GIVING BACK

Irrigation Show attendees won’t be the only ones benefiting from the event’s stay in Southern California. The Long Beach community will also benefit through a community service project where attendees and exhibitors alike will help assemble garden kits for area students.

“One of the priorities of the Irrigation Association the past couple of years has been to leave something positive behind in the communities where we take the Irrigation Show,”

Bowen says. “We want to demonstrate that we’re committed to doing the right things for the right reasons but also maybe teach them a little bit about the industry ... and that the companies in our industry are eager and willing to advance and support the communities where they’re doing business.

“These garden kits are tangible things that can help students with their education and really understand the role water plays in ensuring a reliable and sustainable food supply.”

This marks the second consecutive year that the Irrigation Show has had a community service event. And if last year in San Antonio was any indication, this year’s effort in Long Beach will be a smashing success, too.

“We were blown away by the response of our attendees last year,” Bowen says. “We had budgeted a couple of hours to assemble the backpacks and school supplies we did last year. We had such an onslaught of people who wanted to help that we were finished in 15 or 20 minutes. It just shows how eager to help the people in this industry truly are.”

For more information on the 2024 Irrigation Show, visit www.irrigation.org. 

EVERY DROP COUNTS

The future of irrigation software

BY MAX MORENO | CONTRIBUTOR

In the ever-evolving world of landscape maintenance, software solutions have become indispensable tools for professionals looking to streamline operations and optimize resource management. Among the various aspects of landscape maintenance, irrigation water management plays a pivotal role in ensuring the health and beauty of outdoor spaces.

This article delves into the landscape of software solutions tailored specifically to irrigation water management, exploring their features, benefits, and impact on the industry.

Smart controller systems like Hydromatic WeatherTRAK and Weathermatic Smartlink offer powerful software tools to streamline landscape water management. These platforms provide users with advanced features such as asset mapping, allowing account managers to visualize irrigation zones, track system components and organize maintenance tasks precisely.

In addition, software such as Weathermatic Smartlink supports thorough irrigation inspections, allowing users to monitor system performance in real time, detect leaks and ensure efficient water usage. By integrating these functionalities, WeatherTRAK and Weathermatic help users maintain healthy landscapes while optimizing water conservation.



Max Moreno

INTRODUCING NEXUS MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS

Nexus Management Solutions represents the next evolution in landscape maintenance, irrigation water management,



and overall property management. Initially founded by Max Moreno Jr. and Jared Brown with a strict focus on water management, the software is now transforming into a comprehensive platform encompassing all landscape maintenance aspects. Currently being tested by select property and landscape maintenance companies, Nexus is designed to track every detail of a property's

landscape, including irrigation systems, plant species, asset management and landscape size.


One of Nexus Management Solutions' key features is its ability to map landscape assets and track the history of landscape issues over time.

This gives property managers detailed insights into potential problem areas, allowing for proactive maintenance and reducing costly repairs or water waste.

Additionally, the software can store information on plant species and specific landscape zones, helping users ensure proper care based on the unique needs of each plant. With real-time data on irrigation performance and landscape conditions, Nexus can be a valuable tool for streamlining

operations, improving sustainability, and enhancing the overall efficiency of property management. Nexus could redefine how companies approach landscape and water management as it evolves, offering a one-stop solution for all landscape-related trades.

With Nexus Management Solutions, the opportunity to bridge the communication and data-sharing gap between landscape contractors and their customers, including property managers and HOAs, is exciting. This software will create a seamless flow of information, allowing both sides to access real-time updates on landscape maintenance, irrigation performance, and property conditions.

By enhancing transparency and efficiency, Nexus will help foster stronger relationships, reduce miscommunication and ensure that landscape projects are managed precisely and accountable. This innovation will set a new standard for collaboration and success in the industry. 

WATER WORKS
A growing number of software solutions specifically target irrigation and water management.

Max Moreno is the director of technology and ancillary services with Everthrive Landscape in Riverside, Calif.

Larry Carnes

PRESIDENT

REFLECTIONS WATER GARDENS
WEST DUNDEE, ILL.

1 How did you get into building natural pools?

When my wife and I bought the house we're in now, she wanted a pool. I was in landscaping and the green industry for years. I got into more design and construction. When we decided we wanted a pool, we decided we didn't want the typical concrete box that has to be covered for six months out of the year — we live in Illinois, where everything gets winterized and shut down. We wanted something more natural in look, and unfiltered, because she hated the chlorine. We couldn't find anyone to build it, so we went on this quest to figure it out. We did find a pond builder who said he could do it. I ended up going to work for him. Mine was built, and it blossomed from there. That was the end of 2004. I started Reflections Water Gardens at the end of 2010.

2 What are some trends you're seeing in the pool industry?

Natural swimming pools and natural swimming ponds are really taking off. But what I'm finding in the States is that more people want them to look like ponds versus in Europe, where they want it to look like a pool with plants around it. Now we're actually building them with sand on the bottom. If you're in a warmer climate, it looks like you're in the Caribbean.

3 What are some advancements you've seen, and are expecting, for your industry?

We do a lot of software work with 3D stuff. Everyone wants the outdoor experience, but one of the things we find is they say they want a natural pool, but they still don't want algae. That's a byproduct; you're going to have it. You're going to have biofilm growing on the rocks and all the surfaces. What we're seeing is the introduction of new technology, using ultraviolet light and ozone, to clean the water even more.

4 Tell me about yourself ... what do you and your family do for fun?

We live in Illinois, but we have acreage in Tennessee. I love going there; it's a little farmhouse ... one day I'll retire there. I've always loved the mountains, that's where we'd go when I was a kid. I also love snorkeling, going down to the Caribbean and seeing the white sand beaches. My kids and my step-kids are grown. They're out of the house now. It's just me, my wife and my pack of dogs. I have three German shepherds — two brothers and their mother, and a small mix.

5 That's awesome! Let's get back to business — how do you foresee the next several years for the industry?

I think the market is good. I think people are spending more on their own personal space versus taking big vacations. You know, it's an election year. Everybody blames everything on the election, but we are still getting calls and work coming in. 🍷



BEST ADVICE

"I always thought people had my mentality — go out and work and make money. I learned that isn't the way everyone thinks. You have to instill the proper core values and make your decisions based on those core values. That develops culture. If you don't waver from that, everything runs smooth."

Investing in the team pays off for Sunrise Landscape

#34

BY LAUREN DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR

A comprehensive growth approach incorporating organic and inorganic strategies helped Sunrise Landscape reach No. 34 on the 2024 LM150 list. Sunrise Landscape experienced an 80 percent increase in revenue from 2022 to 2023, giving it the No. 6 ranking on the 2024 list of fastest growing companies.

Headquartered in Tampa, Fla., the company serves all of central and west Florida and plans to expand across the rest of the state and Southeast. It provides full-service commercial landscaping, including maintenance and installation.

On the organic growth side, Sunrise built out a professional sales function, including implementing a CRM and a suite of technology tools to help facilitate the sales process, says CEO Austin Ashmore. It also completed multiple acquisitions in existing and adjacent markets to supplement the company's organic growth strategy.

"The key to both organic and inorganic strategies has been great people," Ashmore says. "We want to ensure we grow sustainably and continue to build a great company, and we could not do it without the folks in our organization from top to bottom."

Sunrise invested in its sales team early on, and Ashmore says that approach has been critical to creating recurring cash flow. That money has allowed the company to invest in its people and processes, ensuring it can consistently provide a first-rate customer experience that drives long-term relationships and business.

Acquiring businesses also has allowed the Sunrise team to invest in systems and talent they wouldn't have been able to afford otherwise, Ashmore adds.

An investment in technology has helped Sunrise Landscape rise to No. 34 on the 2024 LM150 list.



"Many folks assume that companies acquire other companies to cut costs and reduce overhead, but our approach is different," he says. "We believe in using the additional scale from acquisitions to invest back into our team to build best-in-class capabilities."

Ashmore says he often uses the metaphor "building the plane while flying it" to describe how the company implements its growth strategy. He says the leaders at Sunrise aren't satisfied with the status quo and continue pushing the organization to be its best.



Austin Ashmore

"Change is hard, and it's not for the faint of heart," he says. "We strive to have an entrepreneurial culture, which often sounds fun — and it is — but it's also a lot of work."

Sunrise's team is a major component of achieving that goal. From its employees in the field to the ones in the back office, Ashmore says they are all focused on providing an exceptional client experience each day.

"The reality is that not everyone is cut from that cloth, and that's OK. We're looking for great teammates who embrace our entrepreneurial vision," he says. "Our philosophy is that the only real differentiator in our industry is talent, so we strive to have best-in-class talent across the board. I'm incredibly grateful for our team."

For other professionals looking to grow their companies, Ashmore advises them to get comfortable with being uncomfortable.

"Make a decision based on the best information you have available," Ashmore says. "If it turns out to be the wrong decision, that's OK as long as you're humble enough to admit the mistake and adaptable enough to course correct."

Looking ahead, Sunrise plans to continue supporting its employees with the training, technology and capital they need to provide successful customer experiences. While organic growth will remain a priority, Ashmore says acquisitions will also play a major role in the company's strategy.

"We're always looking for great companies to buy, and we've found it to be a true win-win," he says. "We're able to add great talent and experience to our team while creating awesome opportunities for career advancement for the teams that we acquire." 📌

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.



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.

Empowering your second-in-command

For years, I have promoted the concept of developing your second-in-command. It's now a growing trend in the industry.

Three years ago, we started a second-in-command peer group at Jeffrey Scott Consulting to develop chief operating officers and division managers overseeing at least \$5 million in revenue. We have learned much from this commitment.

We know that all successful company owners need a high-functioning leadership team. A portion of our consulting is focused on building and developing that team. But to grow even stronger, we found that many entrepreneurs need a "leader of leaders," an empowered second-in-command to help run the entire business.

Some very famous entrepreneurs have employed this position. Steve Jobs at Apple had Tim Cook, and Ray Kroc at McDonald's had Fred Turner. You can use this same concept, too.

Here are the five compelling roles a second in command — or a No. 2 — can play in your business.

1 Implementer The main role of a No. 2 is to help keep the operation healthy, streamlined and operating within budget. The implementer is a tactical position with equal parts organizer, process builder and coach. It's all about people, and the implementer must be highly skilled at managing managers and leading leaders.

In this role, the No. 2 acts as a filter, taking the steady stream of ideas from the owner

and prioritizing and filtering them. Desiree Bouchard does a great job of this as the general manager for Great Lakes Landscape Design in Oak Park, Mich. She has to manage up to Great Lakes' owner, Ivan Katz, and of course manage down to the rest of the team.

2 Complementor Sometimes the role of the No. 2 is to focus on areas of the business that the owner does not have the time or the skills for. For example, as an owner, you may be best at production management but need someone better at maintenance management.

Andy Tumolo with Maple Leaf Associates in Putnam Valley, N.Y., is someone who has enjoyed more freedom and overall growth in his business after he brought in a general manager for all his maintenance services.

3 Successor This is a transitory role where the second-in-command is studying under the owner to take over the role of CEO of the business, and sometimes the intention is for the successor to buy the business. It takes extra care to choose someone

who can both run and buy a business, but Matt Hunter, the president of New Garden Landscaping & Nursery in Greensboro, N.C., is an example of someone who has taken this route to ownership.


4 Mentor Sometimes an owner will hire an older, semi-retired person to act as both chief operating officer and mentor to the owner. It's an odd couple, but it helps the younger owner gain confidence and skills.

I know of a second-generation sibling group that bought out their father and used this model to help gain their sea legs in the business.

5 CEO Barney Naylor of Naylor Landscape in Kalamazoo, Mich., is a long-time client who needed to bring in a strong COO to run the operations. The business had plateaued, and while he wanted to keep growing, it was time for him to enjoy outside pursuits.

After doing our due diligence, we opted to bring in someone so strong that he could almost operate as the CEO. That's not their official role, but they manage the whole company, achieving higher profits than ever before.

We also have helped clients onboard formal CEOs to run their businesses. It's all possible and a surefire way to grow your business.

If you are looking for this role at your firm or want to join our second-in-command peer group, email me at jeff@jeffreyscott.biz, and we can discuss options for your business. 





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.

Better, faster decisions with automated reporting

Few people would argue that making better, faster decisions is essential to running a more efficient landscape business. Still, many owners in our industry continue to run their operations from the top down based on instincts.

If owners have good instincts, their businesses grow. But what happens when owners start adding managers and no longer make all of the decisions? If a company does not have actionable reports from which managers can make informed decisions, there will be a problem.

Part of what we do at The Herring Group is to help people at landscape companies, down to the crew leader level, make decisions based on timely, relevant data. This approach fosters a results-oriented culture, improving companies' profit margins, owners' life margins and employees' autonomy.

So, how do you help your team make better, faster decisions? You get the right data to the right person at the right time in the right format. The best way to accomplish this is to automate reporting.

IS YOUR DATA TRUSTWORTHY?

We are all familiar with the idea of “garbage in, garbage out” — aka GIGO — when it comes to data. Hopefully, you operate your company with proven processes and a software platform you trust so you can rely on your data. Even with those things in place, many companies still are not confident in their data.

How do you know if you have a GIGO problem? Two big signs are if no one is using the data or if people are using the data but complain about its accuracy. How do you fix a GIGO problem? The issues would have already been fixed if there were internal resources to identify the problem. So, you probably need an outside resource who knows the industry and understands the numbers to get to the root of the problem.

STRATEGIC PLANNING

Once you address your GIGO problem, the next step is to formulate your data reporting strategy.

Start by determining what information is needed at each level. Owner/executives, managers and field personnel will need different reports for different uses on different timelines. Consider what information will create understanding and motivate your team members to act to achieve the results you want.

Then, think about the best way to convey this data — spreadsheets, charts, graphs or dials. Visuals are often the default and can help create understanding and motivation, but spreadsheets clarify the next steps. Scoreboards are also an effective format. People are familiar with the concepts of winning and losing, and

most people want to win. In areas where you may want to create friendly competition, such as with crew leaders and account managers, displaying data on TV screens can be helpful.

TAKING OWNERSHIP


As part of your strategy, you will want to appoint someone to own the reporting process and set a budget. Creating and managing automated reports requires coordinating people with many types of expertise—someone with a vision for the reports, someone with knowledge about your software system and how to access the data within it, someone with database expertise and a development expert, etc.

You also will need a plan to implement this new data-focused approach in your business, including training your team members and incorporating it into your everyday practices and culture.

READY, SET, GO

Once you are confident in your data integrity and data strategy, you can begin executing your automated reporting program.

While it may seem complicated to set up automated reporting, it is more important than ever to forgo managing based on instincts alone and instead find a way to put relevant data into your team's hands as soon as possible. I can assure you that your competitors at private-equity-backed landscape companies are focused on automated reporting.

When it comes to automated reporting, you have three choices — do it yourself, hire a firm to help you do it or do nothing. Which do you choose? 





BY JASON NEW

The author is a founding principal and executive coach for McFarlin Stanford.

How to master financial fundamentals

Q I need to get a better handle on my finances. How important is it to have a good bookkeeper?

— Reader-Submitted Question

A If you're like most landscape business owners, you probably got into this because you love working with your hands and spending time outdoors, not because you're passionate about spreadsheets. I get it. But the financial side of your business is just as important. If you don't have a reliable bookkeeper, you're missing out on one of the most important tools for running a smooth, successful operation.

Let's dive into why a good bookkeeper is worth their weight in gold.

1. Keeping your house in order.

A bookkeeper is your go-to person for keeping your finances organized. A skilled one makes sure your income, expenses, payroll and taxes are tracked accurately so nothing falls through the cracks. Without this, your financial picture can get messy fast, leading to missed opportunities and costly mistakes. Once I brought in a professional, it was a game-changer. The stress lifted, and I could focus on growing the business, knowing the finances were in capable hands.

2. Improving your cash flow. Cash flow is the oxygen for your business, and it's a common challenge for landscape businesses, especially if you manage your finances by simply monitoring your bank account. A reliable bookkeeper helps track your cash flow, ensuring you know exactly what's coming in and going out. Having a clear handle on cash flow also



helps you spot problems faster. These insights can help you adjust your pricing, set better payment terms or shift your focus to the areas that bring in the most revenue.

3. Tax season without the headaches.

Let's face it — tax season is stressful, especially if your books aren't in order. The last thing you want is to scramble to organize receipts, invoices and records. A good bookkeeper keeps you prepared year-round. They ensure your financials are up to date and work with your accountant to make sure everything is accurate. Not only does this save you the headache of trying to pull everything together yourself, but it also helps you avoid costly mistakes.

4. Making informed decisions

with data. Running a landscape business is all about decisions — when to hire, when to invest in new equipment or even when to expand. The best decisions aren't based on guesswork; they're backed by data. This is where a good bookkeeper really shines. Are you hitting your margins? Should you hire? Do you know how your departments are performing? With accurate financial data, you can make informed decisions that move your business forward without taking unnecessary risks.

5. More time to focus on what you do best.

Let's be honest: bookkeeping is time-consuming. And you didn't get into the business because you love data. If you're handling the books, you're not spending time growing your business. By bringing in a bookkeeper, you free up time to focus on areas where you truly add value, whether that's meeting with clients, designing new projects, or leading your team.

So what should be your next steps? If you're serious about getting a handle on your finances, hiring an expert bookkeeper is a must. They're more than just number crunchers — they're an essential part of your team, helping you grow your business. Whether you're a small operation or a larger company, investing in quality bookkeeping will pay off in the long run.

If you are looking for someone local, ask for referrals from trusted partners and get plenty of references. The last thing you want is a disorganized bookkeeper with a history of job-hopping.

If you want to save time looking for expert support tailored to the landscape industry, McFarlin Stanford is here to help. We only work with landscapers, and we have industry data from other clients and ACE Peer Group members so you can truly see how you are performing compared to competitors and industry averages. We offer comprehensive bookkeeping services that can give you the peace of mind you need to focus on what matters most — running and growing your business.

Email us at info@mcfarlinstanford.com or call us at (214) 702-1955 and talk to one of our financial experts today.



BY KEN THOMAS

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

Solving problems for sales success

A sign in the office of one of our clients read: “The best sales people don’t come to work every day trying to sell, they come in trying to help people and solve problems.”

This hit home for me. By design, I am a problem solver, and I love the art of selling my solutions to others.

A focused sales plan and, in particular, the important role of the business developer, is a key component of Envisor’s Green Dot Operating System. Our sales development approach is based on our many years of business ownership and sales experience. Additionally, we have adopted the strategic selling philosophies developed by Robert Miller and Stephen Heiman, the founders of Miller Heiman Group.

The Miller Heiman sales process is a repeatable sales framework for managing complex business-to-business deals. It focuses on understanding buyer’s needs, identifying decision-makers and developing a custom, streamlined sales process.

Understanding and implementing the fundamentals of the sales process are keys to business development success and are critical to being a successful sales person. At the end of the day, though, the real key to winning the sales game is to be able to identify and solve your clients’ problems.

One of my favorite authors of sales content is Jeb Blount. In his best-selling book “People Buy You,” he writes, “Sales is pretty simple ... solve your customer’s problem and they will buy your solution!”

Blount goes on to point out that in order to find out what your prospects or client’s problems are, you need to be able to connect with them. In today’s information and technology age, it has become harder and less intuitive for salespeople to connect with clients in order to identify the true problems that our prospects are facing.

“At the end of the day, though, the real key to winning the sales game is to be able to identify and solve your clients’ problems.”

In the book, Blount lays out five levers that work together to help you move others to share their true problems by tapping into motivations that are driven by human emotion.

CONNECT

Connecting opens the door to problem-solving. Connecting is about building an emotional bond with another person so that they feel comfortable discussing their real problems with you. You connect by giving people what they truly want — to feel appreciated, valued and important. Listening is the real secret to connecting. The more people talk, the closer they will feel to you and the more comfortable they will feel, revealing their true problems.

SOLVE PROBLEMS

Problems are like icebergs; we can only see the tip. In other words, there is an art to uncovering our prospect’s true problems, and of course, it starts with connection. When it comes to problem-

solving, questions are king. Learning and practicing effective questioning skills are central to a successful career in sales and business. The key to uncovering and solving problems is questioning and listening intently.

BUILD TRUST

Without trust you cannot effectively conduct business. It is the foundation on which all relationships rest. To build trusting relationships, you must provide consistent evidence that you can be trusted. It is essential that you develop the discipline to consistently manage your behavior, follow through on commitments and keep your promises.

CREATE POSITIVE EMOTIONAL EXPERIENCES

It’s not hard to find opportunities to go the extra mile for your prospects or clients. Whether remembering birthdays, family member’s names or recognizing accomplishments, when you consistently create joy in the lives of your prospects, customers and peers without expecting anything in return, you build emotional bonds or anchors. Emotional experiences are most impactful when personalized to the recipient.

Successful business owners and sales professionals understand the strategic sales process and the value of activity and hard work. More importantly, they understand that if they can identify and solve a prospect’s problems, they will win their business and, in the long run, their loyalty.

For more information on Jeb Blount, visit salesgravy.com, and to connect with us, visit envisorco.com. 

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[HOW'D IT GO?]

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How was your Elevate experience?
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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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Lessons from Hidden Creek Landscaping

Possibly my favorite thing about the landscaping industry is the people who work in it. In my 40 years in business, I've met so many kind people running or working in small businesses and so many people who were willing to help lift up the next person and help them with their business.

I originally started The Grow Group to foster a community where landscape professionals could gather to share ideas. We wanted to bring together people willing to share their expertise and help each other. Our events have grown to include even more companies and people in all roles who come together to try to get better and share their knowledge with others.

It's why our headliner event, the GROW! Annual Conference, always includes a company tour as part of the event. In 2025, I'm so excited to take people to Columbus, Ohio, to see a company that's not far from my own. We'll visit Hidden Creek Landscaping, owned by Jason Cromley, and will learn from the talented team behind their incredible growth story. I've known Jason for years, and I've learned a lot from him.

SHOWING VERSUS TELLING

Jason and his team do a phenomenal job of demonstrating their expertise and skill, not just talking about it. Their social media channels are full of examples of their work, and their facility exudes professionalism and craftsmanship, too. There's consistency in their work and how they showcase it, making it memorable in their market.

“Investing in our own businesses is where we make the best return, so look for ways to bet on yourself, to do something, and you'll move your business forward.”

This philosophy extends to their branding, too. As Jason pointed out during his interview on my podcast, “The Grow Show powered by Stihl,” branding can be a bit of a chicken-or-the-egg conundrum. You must have enough money to afford branding, but you also must have the presence that brands create to get more work. People seeing your trucks in their neighborhood is a huge driver of residential business, and not having recognizable branding on your trucks is a huge miss. But branding every truck costs money, too. It's one of many necessary costs for landscaping businesses that want to grow.

BUILDING RELATIONSHIPS

The Hidden Creek team does a fantastic job of building relationships in their community and then turning those relationships into business for the team. They go out and make sales happen rather than waiting for the sales to come to them, and it's been critical to their growth. This team does what it takes to get a customer to work with them, and Jason is quick to share his tricks of the trade.


IF YOU DO NOTHING, NOTHING HAPPENS

At GROW! 2024, we heard Jason tell us about building his company's headquarters. He and his team took

a chance, building a larger facility than they needed at the time and more than they could afford if they didn't grow the business. It put them into a no-option position where they had to grow to keep the lights on, and it worked for them. Their facility has become a showcase where clients can see samples of their work, look at material options and make decisions about their projects.

This isn't an approach I'd necessarily recommend as a business consultant, but Jason did one thing I think all entrepreneurs should do — he bet on himself. Investing in our own businesses is where we make the best return, so look for ways to bet on yourself, to do something, and you'll move your business forward.

You can listen to my podcast interview with Jason to learn more about this impressive company. And to go all-in, join me in Columbus Feb. 24-26 for GROW! 2025. We'll tour Hidden Creek Landscaping's great facility, learn from their team in small-group sessions, and attend keynotes and breakout sessions. We have so many amazing opportunities to learn together in Columbus, and I hope to see you there!

For more information on GROW! 2025, visit growgroupinc.com/grow-2025. 

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