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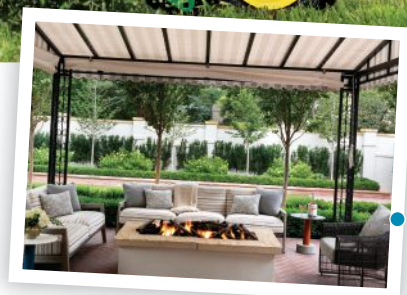
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[STATE OF THE INDUSTRY]

Looking ahead

How did your business fare in 2025, and what are your predictions for 2026? Let's talk about where the green industry is headed.

Let us know how you think the next year will go, and you could be featured in LM's "State of the industry" report. Email Editor-in-Chief Scott Hollister (shollister@northcoastmedia.net) and Editorial Director Seth Jones (sjones@northcoastmedia.net) to let us know your predictions.



LM CONNECT

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Life on the road reveals a year to remember

I'm generally not much into superstitions, but if I were, the way my 2025 started would have had me worried about what the rest of the year held for me.

In early January, I had a trip on the books that was going to take me to Florida for a meeting of Jeffrey Scott's second-in-command peer group, followed by a few days in Baltimore for the annual Mid-Atlantic Nursery Trade Show (MANTS). I'd get to meet some of the real up-and-comers in the industry, get a little warm-weather respite from Kansas City in January and explore one of the horticulture industry's premier events.

Old Man Winter had other ideas, though. As the first leg approached, a major winter storm took aim at Kansas City, first with freezing rain and then a 10-inch dumping of snow. A full day before I was scheduled to head to Florida, my flight was canceled, and there were no options to rebook that would get me to the Sunshine State before the Jeffrey Scott event ended.

Bummer, but I licked my wounds, booked a new flight directly to Baltimore for MANTS and started thinking about the crab cakes I would take down while I was in town.

That, it turned out, was wishful thinking, because that flight got canceled, too. Not before I had driven to the airport and even boarded the plane, mind you, but the result was the same. I wasn't going to Baltimore that day, couldn't get there the next day in time to do anything of substance at MANTS, so ultimately had to scuttle the trip entirely.

Fortunately, the train wreck to start the year was the exception and not the rule. Aside from a few delays here and there and the usual stresses that come along with modern travel, it was smooth sailing the rest of the year.

And as I reflect on that year as we wrap things up for 2025 and look ahead to 2026 ... man, what a year it was. I spent time in virtually every

“I've learned this is an amazing industry made up of amazing people, and I feel fortunate to be a part of it.”

corner of the country for events big and small. I got up close and personal with landscape companies in North Carolina, Ohio and Maryland, which made this industry newcomer feel a little less new with each passing tour.

I hiked around mountains in Colorado (at a Kress media event) and Park City, Utah (at the OPEI Annual Meeting). I rocked out to Pearl Jam in Raleigh-Durham, N.C., during a visit to Bland Landscaping, and to Wilco in Cleveland when I was in town for North Coast Media's Content Meetings. I met a real-life former Blue Angel pilot at Aspire's Ignite conference in Southern California, walked 145,000 steps and did 375 meetings (give or take) at October's Equip Expo in Louisville, Ky., and

saw trick-riding cowboys and cow-girls during Elevate in Phoenix. I went to the Masters!

And most memorable of all, I got to hang out with some of the best people I've had the privilege to meet in my career — the landscape pros I got to spend time with along the way. I've learned this is an amazing industry made up of amazing people, and I feel fortunate to be a part of it. It was a great year for *Landscape Management*, a great year for the landscape industry, and I can't wait to do it all again in 2026.

Finally, I'd be remiss if I didn't offer a heartfelt tip of the cap to Bill Roddy, a longtime friend and a trusted colleague here at *LM* who left in October for a new career challenge with Envu.

Bill was one of the reasons I decided to join the *LM* team last April, and we're going to miss his publishing expertise and deep industry knowledge. Fortunately, Envu is a good friend of the magazine, so we'll still see him around plenty, including at this month's *LM* Growth Summit in Orlando. We wish him nothing but the best in his new adventure.

And similarly, we have nothing but good wishes for all of you as we wrap up 2025 and prepare to roll into 2026. We hope your year was as productive as ours, and we can't wait to see how we can grow things even more in the 12 months to come. 🍷

EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD



MORE ONLINE

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

What was the best piece of advice you ever received, and why was it so impactful?

“Build trust and integrity, keep your word, and you don’t have to take every job that comes along if it falls outside of your business goals.

Just because you can, doesn’t mean you have to. A handshake can be as binding as a contract, as trust is essential for long-term success and a good business and personal reputation.”



Landscape Professionals

Bryan Christiansen
Mariani Premier Group
Lake Bluff, Ill.

Troy Clogg
Troy Clogg Landscape Associates
Wixom, Mich.

Pam Dooley
Plants Creative Landscapes
Decatur, Ga.

Paul Fraynd
Sun Valley Landscaping
Omaha, Neb.

Mike Giese
Perfecturf Lawncare
Mt. Pleasant, Wisc.

Chris Joyce
Joyce Landscaping
Cape Cod, Mass.

Jerry McKay
McKay Landscape Lighting
Omaha, Neb.

Max Moreno
Nexus Management Solutions
Menifee, Calif.

Bryan Stolz
Winterberry Landscape
& Garden Center
Southington, Conn.

Justin White
K&D Landscaping
Watsonville, Calif.

Industry Consultants

Tito Caceres
Bloom Talent Solutions
Coral Gables, Fla.

Marty Grunder
The Grow Group
Dayton, Ohio

Phil Harwood
Tamarisk Business Advisors
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Jeffrey Scott
Jeffrey Scott Consulting
New Orleans, La.



“A simple one: bet on yourself (and I have!)”

“When I was 17, I was talking to a tractor operator named Gary about how I wanted to grow the company one day so I could just drive around all day like my dad and not have to work that hard. Gary told me, ‘You get out of life what you put in. If you ever want to build something great, you’ve got to be the hardest-working person in that company.’ That moment stuck with me.”



“The best advice I ever received is that you can’t want something more for someone than they want for themselves. Professionally, it’s taught me to empower rather than carry by letting clients and team members own their growth.

Personally, it’s helped me release the weight of others’ choices and focus on showing up with clarity.”



“Early on, my mentor taught me that, ‘You are in the marketing business (and not the landscaping business).’ Then ... I wrote the book ‘Become A Destination Company’ because I realized we were in the people business. Now, we are in the technology business. It’s the three layers of success — marketing, people and technology.”

“Be grateful for all things.”



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LM GALLERY

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

1 Hang loose! Justin White, (left) CEO of K&D Landscaping in Watsonville, Calif., and Sam Gembel, CEO of Atlas Outdoor in Flint, Mich., were feeling good following Gembel's hour-long class at Equip Expo, part of the education presented by *Landscape Management* in Louisville.

2 LM's fantastic four The booth was all set up, and there was a quiet moment before the Equip Expo show got started, so a few members of the **LM** team took time for a quick photo — from left to right are Tod McCloskey, Payton Szymczak, Seth Jones and Craig MacGregor.

3 Party crashers This trio is never late for a Crashers concert, the cover band that performs regularly at Equip Expo. MacGregor and **LM** Editor-in-Chief Scott Hollister are joined by their concert buddy, Lynette Von Minden with Swanson Russell.

4 Going bananas **LM**'s Nader Hassen nabbed a photo with Jesse Cole, the founder of the Savannah Bananas baseball team who delivered the keynote address in front of a packed house at Equip Expo.

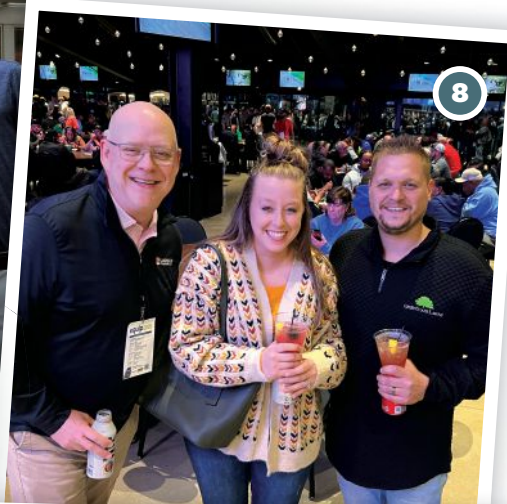
5 Is this holiday card worthy? Nathan Mader (left) and Jones took Ariens up on this photo opportunity and jumped in their snow globe, complete with an Ariens mower and green confetti.

6 Off to the races Jones and Hollister grabbed a quick photo with the official bugler of Churchill Downs, Steve Buttleman, before Equip Expo's Welcome Reception inside the First Turn Club at the famed horse racing venue.





7



8



9



10



11



12

7 Breakfast of champions At Elevate, the LM team met up with their old colleague Bill Roddy (in purple) who now works for Envu. Joining the breakfast are MacGregor, Hollister, Lindsey Hoffman Chappell, Ph.D., Liz Dorland, Jones, Larissa Wolfe and Jake Clabaugh.

8 Cover worthy Hollister ran into Drew Standfuss (right) with Greenscape Lawns and his wife, Tara, during Equip Expo. Greenscape was featured on the cover of LM's May 2025 issue.

9 Do you guys sell medical equipment? That was the question asked of this group. Maybe they sell medical

equipment for the turf industry? From left to right are Kevin Stoltman, McCloskey and MacGregor with Quali-Pro's Ryan Karapas.

10 Water works LM sponsored the installation of a water well to support Weathermatic's Cocktails for a Cause reception at Elevate. With Jones and Hollister are Weathermatic's Mike Mason, CEO, and Lex Mason, president.

11 Friendly faces We ran into LM editorial advisory board member Chris Joyce, Joyce Landscaping, Cape Cod, Mass.,

at the opening night reception at Elevate. Joining Joyce are MacGregor, Jones and Stoltman.

12 Getting the band back together! Jones and Hollister met up to celebrate the hiring of their old friend, Jim Cummins (middle) at the original Johnny's (1953) in Lawrence, Kan. Cummins joins the team as LM's national sales manager.

Westward ho!

Elevate 2025 brought the landscaping industry to Phoenix for education, networking and a little Southwest hospitality

BY LM STAFF

The fourth edition of Elevate, the annual conference and trade show put on by the National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP), played to rave reviews from attendees and exhibitors alike in Phoenix in early November.

It was the first time the event called a Western city home, but even before the event began, NALP CEO Britt Wood said the ability to move Elevate around the country each year was paying dividends.

“(By going to Phoenix) we’re reaching an audience we haven’t reached as much when we were all centered in one location,” Wood told *Landscape Management* for its November issue. “So, we’re really pleased with it.”

On the education front, Elevate offered more than 30 concurrent sessions focused on topics covering a wide array of topics, including finance and accounting, leadership and staff management and sustainability. A pair of regular *LM* columnists — Marty Grunder and Justin White — both led educational sessions in Phoenix.

Elevate kicked off and wrapped up with keynote addresses during Opening and Closing sessions. Kevin Brown, the best-selling author of “The Hero Effect,” talked about the keys to organizational excellence and customer loyalty during the Opening Session,

while *New York Times* best-selling author Ben Nemtin unveiled the secrets to what he calls “the buried life” at the Closing Session.

There was plenty of fun to be had in Phoenix, as well. The week started with a welcoming reception at The Duce, which has been featured on “Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives,” and the annual Elevate Bash at Corona Ranch, which featured a western rodeo, live music and plenty of cowboy games. 🤠



Marty Grunder with Grunder Landscaping Co. and The Grow Group, and a regular *LM* columnist, was among the featured speakers at Elevate 2025 in Phoenix.

INTRODUCING GRANUM: NEW GREEN INDUSTRY BRAND LAUNCHES

Granum has officially launched as the new parent brand for LMN, SingleOps and Greenius, bringing that trio under one cohesive company umbrella with a stated mission to unlock the potential of landscapers and arborists by helping them improve their operations through trusted software and a partnership they rely on to operate and grow with confidence.

The brand launch follows the Nov. 2024 merger of the three companies, which will continue as LMN by Granum, SingleOps by Granum and Greenius by Granum — delivering the same functionality and support, now under a single unified company brand.

“Landscapers and arborists are the backbone of communities

across North America, and our job is to help them run better businesses and build better lives,” said Mark Sedgley, CEO of Granum. “With Granum, we’re 100-percent committed to serving the green industry as their No. 1 software partner — bringing together the trusted power of LMN, SingleOps and Greenius with hands-on partnership that makes a real difference on the ground.”

By unifying three platforms under one partner-first brand, Granum stated it now has the resources and focus to lead the charge of this industry disruption while providing clarity, continuity and confidence for green industry operators.





Clubbing for a cause

FineTurf makes dreams come true with its first charity golf tournament

BY NATHAN MADER | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Editor's Note: "Time for Some Good News" is a feature that spotlights the good deeds, great people and positive stories in the landscaping industry. If you have your own good news to share, reach out to Seth Jones at sjones@northcoastmedia.net or Scott Hollister at shollister@northcoastmedia.net.

Since 2012, the nonprofit organization Dream On 3 has been supporting kids with life-altering conditions by making their best sports-related dreams come true.

Kids ages 5-21 are able to receive a customized experience with their favorite athlete, sports team, sporting event and more thanks to the donations and charitable events organized by Dream On 3. And this year, a familiar face in the turf care industry is getting involved.

You may recognize Jay Wyrick, agronomist at FineTurf in Charlotte, N.C., from the (many) times he's shared his knowledge for LM's "Turf School" feature or even from events such as the LM Growth Summit. But what you may not know is that his team was nominated to take part in Dream On 3's Queen City Business of the Year campaign, a friendly competition between four large and four small (including FineTurf) companies to raise money for kids in need.

"They had a golf outing at the end of June at Top Golf, and all the teams were there," Wyrick says. "They had two former (dream recipients) to talk about their dreams and what the organization had done for them, and so that was a good way to get going and learn more about how everything operates."

And to *really* get things going, the team at FineTurf hosted a golf tournament at North Carolina's Olde Sycamore Golf Club in November, with a goal of raising \$10,000 for the charity.

"Overall, it went really well, and we raised close to our goal of \$10,000 — we

look at that as a success, and I think everybody had a lot of fun," he says.

Despite initially needing to reschedule for weather, Wyrick says the turnout was good, and the support from familiar vendors such as Harrell's, SiteOne, local partners and industry friends went a long way. Plus, a local brewery who was a Queen City campaign finalist in 2024 even donated beverages for the tournament.

And after a day of friendly golf, food and drinks, closest-to-the-pin and longest drive contests, giveaways and more, Wyrick says he got a lot of positive feedback that he hopes can make the tournament even better in the following years.

But before he gets too ahead of himself, Wyrick first plans on experiencing his first Carolinas Dream Gala — the nonprofit's annual black-tie event held in Charlotte each January. Ben Allred, CEO at Dream On 3, says the gala hosts roughly 15-20 dream experience recipients plus their families.

"If celebrities come to our gala, they're typically just attendees, because our kids are our celebrities," Allred says. "Our kids sign autographs. Our kids are the ones that we feature in mission moments. Our kids are introduced to everybody at the gala, and everything at our gala is focused on those kids and their experiences."

The gala hosts around 1,200 people as the pinnacle event of the year, and everything leading up to the gala, including the Queen City campaigns, sponsorships, gala table sales, auctions and more, pulls in somewhere between \$1.5-1.8 million each year. As a signature tradition, it also combines formal wear tennis shoes, further highlighting the sports theme.



Allred says other popular charity events include bar crawls, pickleball and ping pong tournaments, casino nights and more.

And with Dream On 3 being founded in Harrisburg, just northeast of Charlotte, the gala, golf tournament and other charitable events are all ingrained as huge parts of the community. Allred says local companies like FineTurf getting involved really helps further spread awareness and the spirit of giving throughout the city and beyond.

"I think they all had a good time," Wyrick says. "I think it opened a few of these guys' eyes to doing something very similar, to try to work with their communities and help in any way they can through charity, so I thought that was really a good thing to see." 🏌️

PRO'S TOOLBOX

TOP RATED 2025



THE VOTES ARE IN!

Here are your favorite tools to get the job done.

COMPILED BY THE LM STAFF

Everyone in the landscape and lawn care industry — from owner/operators and front-office staff to project managers and rookie crew members — has a favorite tool that helps them get the job done.

Those faves run the gamut from super simple to super complex. Maybe it's a software package that streamlines sales, marketing and invoicing. Perhaps it's a particularly versatile piece of compact equipment. It could be a cutting-edge blower or string trimmer. And it could even be something as simple as a trusted shovel or a go-to herbicide, pesticide or fertilizer.

Last year, *Landscape Management* decided to let its readers have their say on the tools that make

their professional lives just a little bit better in a feature we called Pro's Toolbox. And the response to that feature was so positive that we're running it back again this year.

Through an online submission form, phone calls to some true Friends of LM and face-to-face interactions with contractors in the field and at industry trade shows, we once again asked landscape professionals to tell us about their favorite tools and how they help them do things better, faster and more cost-effectively.

So without further ado, here's the 2025 edition of LM's Pro's Toolbox. We hope you'll see some of your favorites listed here, along with a few new ones that you can add to your personal toolbox.



← Milwaukee Tool M18 transfer pump

milwaukeetool.com

"I have had a hand in the irrigation industry for years, but no longer does it mean I need to have my hands in the water. After many years of using a utility hand pump, the Milwaukee cordless transfer pump saves on time and energy. No longer do I need to kill my shoulder pumping water or blindly make repairs underwater."

— JONATHAN OLTMAN

Fisk Lawnsapes, Colorado Springs, Colo.

Staple Wasp →

staplewasp.com

"We bought two Staple Wasps for a 5-acre project with slopes, swales and curved beds. What would normally take us two days was finished in just five hours — no sore backs, no buckets of bent staples. We've put 30,000-plus staples through each gun with no issues. Great product, great customer service. Buy one: It pays for itself."

— JAY STONEBRAKER

J&J Landscaping, Columbia City, Ind.



↑ iPad Pro

apple.com/ipad-pro

"It might sound funny to nominate something as common as an iPad as a top tool for landscape sales, but honestly, it's been a total game changer for me. I use it every single day to keep my work life organized and moving fast. With OneNote, I make a separate page for every client. I also use it to access our CRM (Aspire) and Property Intel, which makes quoting and mapping a breeze. There are tons of other apps that could make it even more powerful, but honestly, OneNote alone justifies the purchase."

— MATT MENARD

Sun Valley Landscaping, Omaha, Neb.

Kress Commercial equipment ↓

kress.com/en-us

"In late 2024, K&D Landscaping transitioned to fully battery-powered maintenance operations. The Kress Commercial platform provided the power and reliability needed to make that shift practical. It's helped reduce downtime, fuel costs and noise while creating a cleaner, quieter work environment."

— JON WENDT

K&D Landscaping, Watsonville, Calif.



PRO'S TOOLBOX

TOP RATED 2025



Continued from page 13



➡ Greenworks Optimus Z ride-on ZTR mower

greenworkscommercial.com

"(After demos and test drives) we literally bought one on the spot. At one point, when our mowers were propane, we were spending over \$2,000 a month on propane in addition to fuel. Our fuel budget ... has gone down probably close to \$1,000 since we converted to electric. And even when we used it to its fullest extent, we get eight hours of runtime out of our mower."

— **GEORGE KENNEDY**

Terra-scape, Edgewater, Fla.



➡ Stihl GTA 26 cordless pruner

stihlusa.com

"Super convenient to use, can get into small spaces that other chainsaws can't. Feels safer than using a regular chainsaw, as well. Tree limber of my dreams!"

— **HALLE LAMB**

Greenspace Landscaping, Bozeman, Mont.

➡ Vermeer mini skid-steer

vermeer.com/na

"Durable, easy-to-use machines that our teams love. Love the new models and look forward to all the innovative ways Vermeer helps landscape contractors thrive."

— **MARTY GRUNDER**

Grunder Landscaping Co., Dayton, Ohio



Channellock Straight Jaw ➡

shop.channellock.com

"If my utility belt only had two slots, one would be for a Channellock. The Straight Jaw does everything from tightening bolts and nuts to hammering in nails and breaking seized connections. To me, a Channellock is a daily-use multi-tool that lasts a lifetime."

— **JONATHAN OLTMAN**

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Continuously
charges



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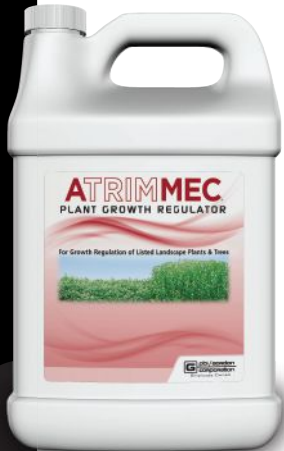


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Continued from page 16



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— **RYAN BIRCH**

Advanced Turf Pros, South Dennis, Mass.



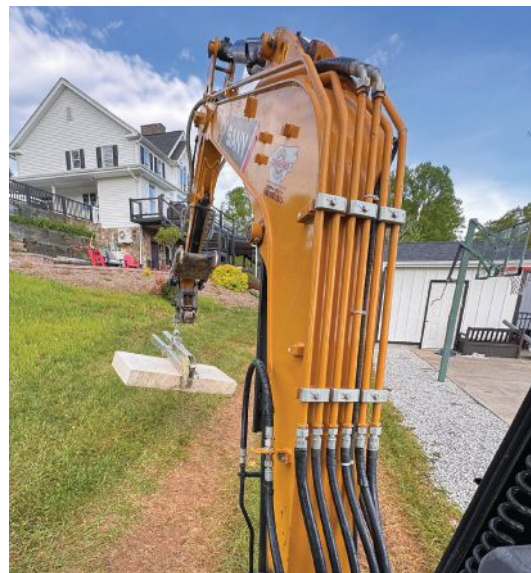
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"Honestly, it's been one of the best investments I've made so far. The right attachment lets a small crew do the work of a big crew, and this bucket allows us to crank out the amount of work that an eight-man crew could, just by having the right machinery. We've beat on ours pretty hard, and it's held up great."

— **HEATH RENFRO**

JRI Lawn and Landscape, Bakersville, N.C.



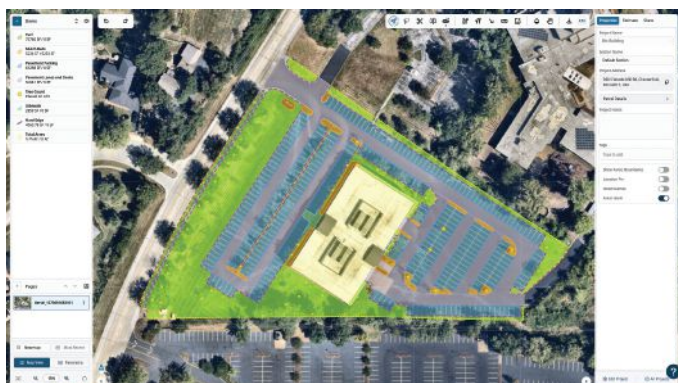


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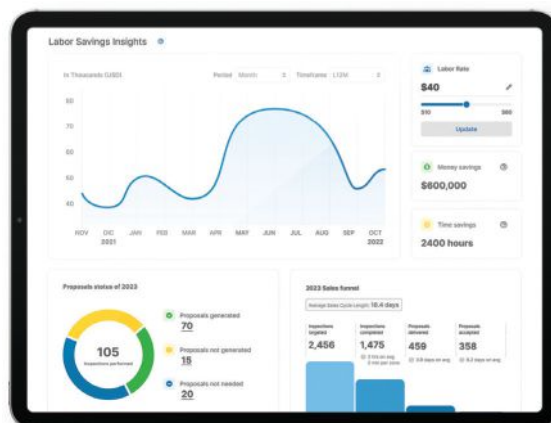
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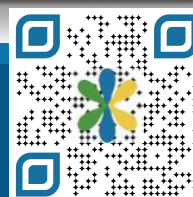
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FULL THROTTLE

It was another banner year for Equip Exposition, with record-setting attendance, a packed trade show and world-class education leading the way

BY LM STAFF

Equip Exposition's ongoing growth and expansion showed no signs of slowing in 2025.

The annual international landscape, outdoor living and equipment show attracted landscapers, lawn care operators, dealers and manufacturers to Louisville, Ky., in October.

Co-located with its partners from Hardscape North America, total attendance for Equip Expo set a record with nearly 30,000 taking part. Those numbers included double-digit growth among both landscaper (12 percent increase) and dealer (17 percent) audiences. And the trade show sold out for the fourth consecutive year, covering more than 1.2 million square feet of indoor and outdoor exhibit space at the Kentucky Exposition Center.

To top it off, Equip Expo pulled in some major recognition on the eve of this year's event when it was named the third-largest trade show in the United States and named the "Greatest Trade Show of 2024" by *Trade Show Executive* magazine during its Gold 100 Awards and Summit earlier this fall.

"The show, which was recently named Greatest Trade Show in the country, continues to serve as the most important gathering for the

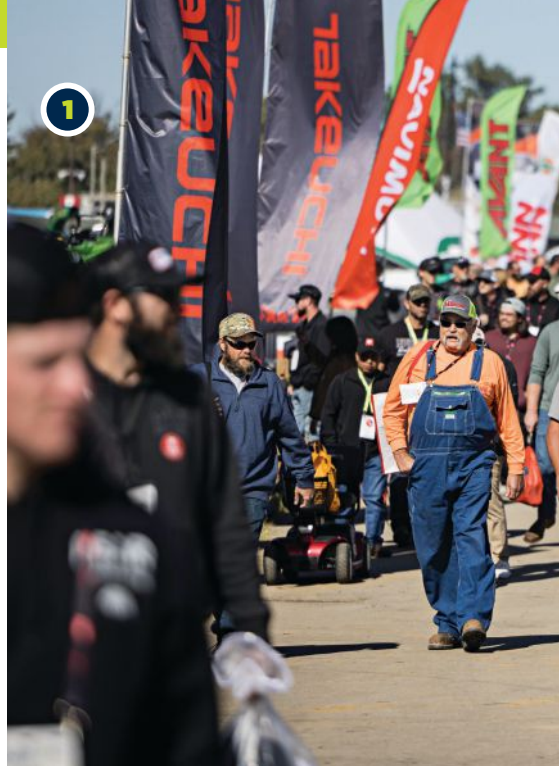
global industry, with attendance from all 50 states and 52 countries," said Kris Kiser, president and CEO of OPEI, which owns and manages Equip Expo.

This year's show featured a standing-room-only keynote address, sponsored by Kress, from Jesse Cole, creator of the Savannah Bananas. Attendees opened the show with a Welcome Reception, sponsored by Caterpillar, at the iconic Churchill Downs race-track, took in a concert featuring Big and Rich with Gretchen Wilson, sponsored by Gravelly, and took part in the annual TurfMutt Fun Run and 5K, sponsored by Active Dynamics.

Equip Expo also offers attendees a broad lineup of education, including 12 sessions for landscape contractors developed and presented by *Landscape Management* magazine. This marked the fourth year *LM* has presented education at Equip Expo.

"Our education classes at Equip Expo feature some of the industry's top minds and are designed to help attendees grow and develop their skills," said Seth Jones, *LM* editorial director. "We're honored to partner with OPEI to present these learning opportunities that highlight innovation and best practices in our industry."

Here's a look at some of the sights and scenes from Equip Expo 2025. 📸



PHOTOS: KYLENE WHITE/GUARDIAN OWL DIGITAL



- 1.** Clear skies and bright sunshine greeted Equip Expo attendees as they explored the outdoor demo area.
- 2.** Justin White from K&D Landscaping and a regular *LM* columnist was one of the presenters for the 12 education sessions presented by *LM* at Equip Expo.
- 3.** Among the educational opportunities presented by *LM* at Equip Expo was "Leadership Insights from the *LM*150," a panel discussion with senior leaders from three companies on the 2025 edition of the annual list.
- 4-5.** The ability to test drive everything from track loaders to stand-on mowers is one of the highlights of the massive outdoor demo area at Equip Expo.
- 6.** The TurfMutt Foundation again presented a dog adoption event at Equip Expo in partnership with the Kentucky Humane Society.



HOT WEEDS ON THE COME UP

Here are the emerging turf problems LCOs should have on their radar

BY NATHAN MADER | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

BROUGHT TO YOU BY

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As many lawn care operators (LCOs) know, turf troubles are always evolving. Whether it's invasive species, changing climates or adapting weeds, no two seasons in turf management are quite the same.

Weather is one of the biggest factors when it comes to the problems LCOs face, and it plays a huge role in how the day, month and even season goes when you're on the job.

Jason James, owner of Turf 212 in Greenville, S.C., says each year feels a little warmer, which results in certain weeds and problems sprouting out of the ground more prevalently than before. For example, in warmer, dry conditions, weeds such as goosegrass and nutsedge can really take over.

"I think goosegrass is the new crabgrass," James says. "Crabgrass is pretty easy to take care of — goosegrass is the new issue."

And from conversations he's had with other industry friends, James says he's



Goosegrass' thick, flat stems make the weed look like a wagon wheel.

not alone in dealing with these more prevalent pests. He's heard that further south toward Columbia, S.C., and below, the warmer weather is causing similar problems.

"When you go 45, 60, 90 days without rain, that's when you're going to start to see a lot of stuff," James says. "It's been getting pretty bad, probably the last two to three years. Especially where we live, it's gotten pretty bad."

KNOW THE FOE

When it comes to goosegrass, it's flat, matted to the ground, and it has a thick, whiter root system with stems that look similar to a wagon wheel.

As a control measure, James says preemergents with prodiamine or dithiopyr applied around early spring are an industry staple. For a budget tip, James says he specifically uses RightLine dithiopyr to save some money.

As for nutsedge, it's a bit trickier. Nutsedge is a particularly difficult weed to control, meaning having it grow in prevalence can mean trouble for LCOs. It has two common varieties: the yellow



Being a tricky weed to control, nutsedge growing in prevalence can be bad news for LCOs.

variant, known for being taller and more cold-tolerant, plus its purple counterpart, which hangs around in warmer climates.

Common control options for nutsedge include the active ingredients halosulfuron, sulfentrazone or imazaquin. Staying with the RightLine theme, James says he uses RightLine sulfencore as a budget option for sedges, and it can also target goosegrass as well.

STAY INFORMED

As new problems sprout up more regularly, not every LCO will be familiar with what to do, so James says it's important to reach out to trusted partners to get help and learn the basics.

"I think everybody needs to just do your research," James says. "If you don't know an answer to a question, the best thing is just to ask someone who knows. Don't just guess."

"A lot of your smaller LCO companies have decided to take it upon themselves and just start helping each other out, because that's what we're going to try to do down here in South Carolina," he says. 

FLIP OF THE COIN

Hot and dry summers aren't the only season being impacted by climate change and evolving weather patterns. On the opposite side of the coin, heavy rainfall and persistent wet seasons can increase the severity of turf diseases.

Dollar spot, leaf spot, the patch diseases (large, brown) and *Pythium* blight can run rampant as precipitation gets more unpredictable, especially if the weather stays warmer like James has noticed in recent years.

BUSINESS BOOSTERS

An unheralded growth strategy

Taking a unique approach to adding new services to your menu — including tree care — can be the ticket to increased revenue

BY EDWARD MORROW | CONTRIBUTOR

Landscapers don't get enough credit, especially when compared to arborists and tree care professionals.

However, landscapers hold a power that even the most successful tree care professionals would envy: a recurring revenue model. You knock down the grass, and it keeps growing. Trees work a lot differently. What arborists fight to develop and maintain in their typical one-off service world is an afterthought in the world of landscaping. Of course, there's always a dormant season, but at least the grass continues to grow.

But maybe you're beginning to worry that you have a one-off service model. Maybe you want to offer tree removal and pruning services. If the training and certification requirements aren't enough to deter you from starting, the insurance aspects might. You can subcontract out major tree work, but maybe you've struggled to forge productive partnerships with the companies in your area. But there's a simpler option, one that already fits your business model.

It's difficult to think strategically and creatively under stress. But you can explore a tree care revenue stream without the headache of a big tree service by thinking about three letters — PHC.

Plant health care is a tree-related favorite at arborist conferences, events and webinars. It helps tree care professionals develop a recurring revenue model. You can only cut down a tree once. You can prune it a little more. But you can treat

trees over and over. PHC can be a simple service that only becomes more complicated as tree issues escalate.

Again, you can easily add this service line as a landscaper and generate additional revenue, thanks to two factors in your favor: your already-established recurring services and your current certifications.

What makes landscapers prime candidates for offering PHC services is the fact that they already offer recurring services. For instance, if you visit a yard every week or two within the growing season and return in the fall for leaf removal or pruning, you already have insights that many arborists may not have because you can keep tabs on how your clients' trees are responding and changing.

If you have a tree treatment program, then you will be privy to the tree's response. This is knowledge and insight you can't buy. Placing your eyes on a tree constantly aids you in becoming a better investigator of tree issues and can help you confidently explain to your client the right course of action and how a particular plant health care product will affect their tree. You can forge deeper relationships with your clients while creating more attractive service offers to beautify their yards further.

Also, you may already have the applicable licenses, and you may have some of the equipment to get started. Watering, mulching, soil decompaction and some biostimulants may not need an applicator's license, so you may be good on that



GETTING STARTED Some basic equipment and a little research may be all you need to kick off a simple yet successful tree treatment program.

front. Still, it's always best to check with your state's department of agriculture.

A soil drench is one of the simplest applications you can provide. If you have a five-gallon bucket, water and product, you can get started. Always read the label because the amount depends on product specifics. For soil decompaction, you may already have access to a tow-behind air compressor. If not, this piece of equipment can be rented from an equipment dealer. Air spades can be bought or financed at relatively low rates.

Again, PHC options can vary. Basic remedies include watering, soil decompaction and mulching. Mid-grade strategies can include health supplements such as soil amendments and biostimulants. Advanced options, like prescription medication, include plant/tree growth regulators, which require an applicator's license.

Plant health care for trees is not only a good service to add to your landscape company, but it will teach you a lot about trees and raise your value as a green industry professional. 🌳

Morrow is an ISA-certified arborist and author. He draws on his accounting background to help industry professionals understand business and serves as a Tree Care Industry Association speaker.

THE BIG ONE

No small feat

BY NATHAN MADER
LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

LOCATION Denver, Colo.

COMPANY Singing Hills Landscape

DETAILS As they say, good things come in small packages, but sometimes it takes some big moves to make that true.

Take Singing Hills' Reflejo Rojo project for example, a renovation of a residential home with a historic brick aesthetic. Space was tight, but that didn't stop the company from making some huge changes.

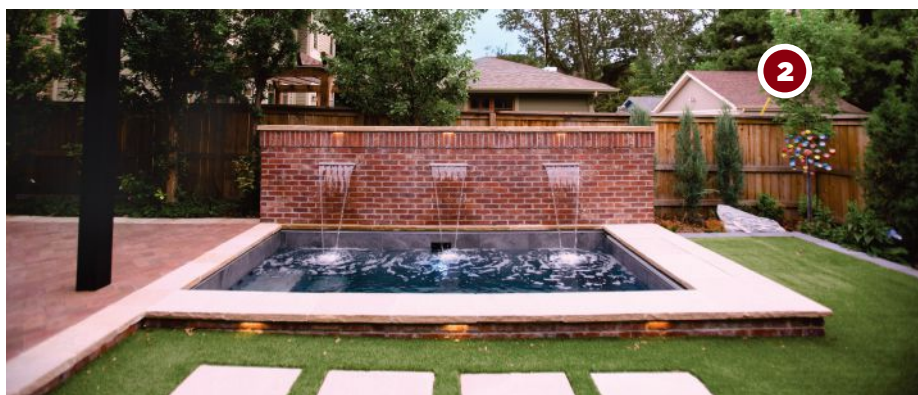
One key move to get this urban home feeling like a serene sanctuary was the addition of a Soake Pool in the backyard, which required a 350-ton crane and a full street closure to drop it in place.

"Next thing you know, it's like a show for the whole neighborhood on crane day," says project manager Mick Edholm.

The company also worked vertically to add more character in the small space, both with water features against the pool wall and some extra greenery on the garage.

"We built some steel structures that we bolted to the wall and then put (some) faux green walls up to just soften it and add an element of green year-round — just in a place where there's not going to be much that survives on that hot south-facing brick wall," says Jack Leman, CEO of Singing Hills Landscape.

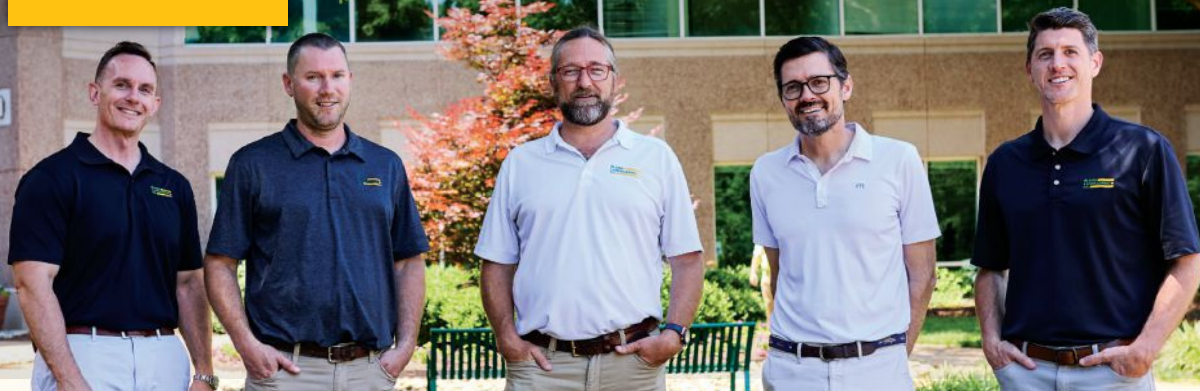
Plus, with some artificial turf and new plantings in the backyard, Edholm and Leman say it creates a safe and relaxing environment for the whole family to enjoy, and it ultimately won the property a silver award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence program. (M)



Captions | **1.** In addition to low maintenance plantings and turf, the redesign came with several hardscape elements, like a louvered pergola, a new courtyard patio and stonework. **2.** To get creative with saving space, Singing Hills used the area behind the Soake Pools plunge pool wall to hide utilities like landscape lighting transformers and a water pump for the pergola misters. **3.** Leman says the family mows with a small robotic mower, and Singing Hills does fall and spring cleanups, plus other requested jobs throughout the year. **4.** Privacy was a big goal for the clients, meaning a few existing trees were kept for their height and screening.

PHOTOS: SINGING HILLS LANDSCAPE

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HARDSCAPE SOLUTIONS

A work of art

BY NATHAN MADER
LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

LOCATION Denver, Colo.

COMPANY Designs By Sundown

DETAILS The owners of this 1914 Spanish revival home have a keen eye for artistic design, making this site an obvious choice to upgrade from the previous mundane landscaping to an award-winning blend of historic roots and modern charm.

Keven Winkelmann, PLA with Designs By Sundown (DBS), says privacy was a key goal for the renovations, and a 2-foot grade change from the front street to the back alley was a key challenge that was solved with a new retaining wall and staircase.

In addition, DBS' Jeromy Montano, PLA, ASLA, says the back perimeter wall was increased by nearly 4 feet to further the secluded feel, and due to the historic neighborhood, materials had to be carefully reused or selected to meet the neighborhood's standards.

"Given that the back wall was a structural wall, it allowed us to kind of backfill that with soil to create a raised planter," he says.

And when it came to plantings and a handful of sculptures on display, Montano says a lot of work went into finalizing the small details.

"Every little detail mattered to (the clients) ... and everything was very meticulous, from the plant material to the placement of each tree," he says.

And the details definitely mattered, winning the property a gold award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence program. 🏆



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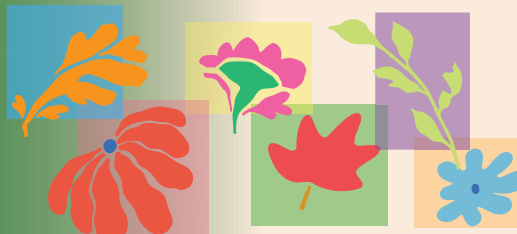
Captions | 1. Keven Winkelmann, PLA, says weekly maintenance is done to mow the front yard plus hedge and prune all the plant material. 2. Jack Pear trees and large shade trees were planted for privacy, and the backyard uses synthetic turf for easy maintenance. 3. The clients utilize the property during the winter, so Big Berta spruce and other evergreens make up some of the plantings to add a seasonal touch to the landscape. 4. Jeromy Montano, PLA, ASLA, says the clients wanted to embrace the multiple different living and garden areas, and incorporating their sculptures in a thoughtful way helped give these places more character.

PHOTOS: KIMBERLY
GAVIN PHOTOGRAPHY

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FROM THE SOURCE

Beating the odds as a landscape business owner

Research, conversations and meetings suggest that this one practice separates the most profitable landscapers from those that are just getting by

BY SAMUEL ADEYEMO | CONTRIBUTOR

One of the most gut-wrenching stories that I have heard came at a recent National Association of Landscape Professionals (NALP) dinner, where I was seated across the table from a successful, but extremely stressed, entrepreneur. In between bites of broccoli and steak, he haltingly narrated what I have come to call the landscape entrepreneur's "cliff story."

Like many others, the entrepreneur got his start in high school, where landscaping was a way to make extra money during the summers. He kept it up in college and did well enough to graduate debt-free, and then decided to go into it full-time after graduating because he loved designing beautiful outdoor spaces, and the math on the financial return was compelling.

Over a period of five years, he had grown his landscaping business to about \$600,000 in revenue. He knew he could do better, and he set his goal at doubling revenue in the next two years. Like everything else he had done in life, he hit his goals — his team and customers grew, as did his reputation as one of the premier firms in his region. And his revenue did double.

That is where he discovered the cliff. Despite doubling in revenue, he took home *less* money than he had the year before. All that hard work, just to make less money.

It doesn't add up. Why would sharp, hungry entrepreneurs go after jobs that don't make money? In an industry where revenues among the companies on the annual LM150 list have been

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“Job costing is one of the most unloved, yet most important, functions for a landscaping business owner to perfect. And mastering this skill is the difference between landscapers who make it over the cliff and those who don’t.”

growing almost every year, why do so many landscaping companies fail? Perhaps an even more important question is what distinguishes the companies recording record revenues from those barely making it?

The answer is clear — most landscaping business owners struggle to accurately calculate how much money they will make on the job they are bidding on. And this is because they do not accurately estimate the full cost of the job. Job costing is one of the most unloved, yet most important, functions for a landscaping business owner to perfect. And mastering this skill is the difference between landscapers who make it over the cliff and those who don’t.

A very basic job costing framework includes the direct and indirect costs of any job you bid on. Direct costs are the expenses that can be directly attributed to a specific job. They include:

- Labor
- Materials
- Subcontractors
- Permitting
- Fees

A more robust framework also includes indirect costs. Indirect costs are the expenses necessary to run your business that cannot be directly tied to a single project:

- Office rent/mortgage
- Administrative salaries
- Utilities
- Insurance
- Vehicle expenses
- Equipment depreciation/maintenance
- Marketing and advertising
- Professional fees

This is a lot to do for every single job, and you can see why so many business owners skip this step (and subsequently lose their shirts). However, it is essential. Here are a few ways to go about it:

1. If you are the DIY type, build a spreadsheet that calculates all these numbers. Have inputs for all direct cost categories and convert the indirect cost into a ballpark percentage.

2. There are also great software products that make the process of pricing jobs easy. For example, the company that I co-founded, Duranta (getduranta.com), uses AI to help make creating an accurate job costing as simple as drawing on a map.

Irrespective of the path you take, remember that having a consistent job-costing process leads to accurate estimates. And accurate estimates lead to profitable jobs and a profitable business. 

Adeyemo is the co-founder and CEO of Duranta, an AI-powered software platform for landscapers and lawn care professionals.



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BUSINESS BOOSTERS

The benefits of a balanced budget

An effective water budget can offer landscape pros a sustainable, cost-effective way to support plant health

BY MAX MORENO | CONTRIBUTOR



In the landscape industry, the term “water budget” gets used often, but the motivation behind it varies.

Sometimes a client wants to reduce utility expenses. Other times, a local water agency requires sites to stay within a specific allocation. Many HOAs and commercial properties simply plan a yearly water allowance in their financial budget. Water budgeting also becomes critical after landscape renovations designed to reduce water use. And beyond all of that, it’s simply the responsible thing to do for our environment and communities.



Max Moreno

A water budget isn’t much different from a financial budget. We determine what we have, what we need and what we actually use. A financial budget helps prevent overspending; a water budget helps prevent overwatering. Overwatering remains one of the leading causes of plant decline, disease, runoff and wasted money. Water budgeting gives landscape managers a clear way to confirm whether irrigation is aligned with expectations or diagnose why it isn’t.

Water budgeting is becoming increasingly essential as rising water rates, drought stress and regulatory pressures continue to influence how

landscapes are maintained. When forecasted and tracked correctly, a water budget is not just a report — it becomes a planning tool that guides responsible water use throughout the year.

While many managers compare usage year-to-year in hopes of staying within a target range or improving consumption by a percentage, the most accurate approach is an allocation-based water budget rooted in measurable data rather than guesswork. This method incorporates:

- **Landscape area (LA):** The irrigated square footage.
- **Plant type (PF):** Crop coefficient for turf, shrubs, trees, etc.
- **Irrigation efficiency (IE):** Performance of the irrigation system.
- **Evapotranspiration (ET):** How much water the landscape needs based on weather.

With these inputs, managers can calculate how much water the site actually needs to maintain plant health. The standard formula looks like this: **$ET \times PF \times LA \times 0.62 = \text{Monthly water budget in gallons}$** (0.62 converts inches of water demand into gallons applied).

This method produces a defensible and realistic allocation based on science, weather and system performance — not assumptions. It also provides justification when usage increases during heatwaves or when seasonal plant demand spikes. Likewise, it highlights opportunities to reduce water when conditions allow.

Budget creation is only one step; tracking it routinely is where real value is captured. Meter readings can be collected monthly or weekly. The more frequently data is reviewed, the faster managers can detect issues such as programming errors, line breaks, stuck valves or high flow. Early detection protects plant material, reduces damage risk and lowers repair expenses.

The benefits of water budgeting go far beyond compliance. Applying the right amount of water leads to healthier plants and financial savings. Those savings can then be reinvested into property improvements like smart controllers, irrigation retrofits or landscape upgrades, enhancing both water efficiency and long-term site value. For landscape contractors, this creates opportunities not only to save clients money but also to recommend meaningful enhancements rather than reactive repairs.

Ultimately, water budgeting creates clarity, accountability and predictability. It reduces environmental impact, supports long-term plant health and ensures every dollar spent on water is intentional. Whether driven by agency requirements, financial goals or responsible stewardship, water budgeting has become a best practice that benefits everyone — the landscape company, the property manager, the client and, most importantly, the landscape itself. 🌱

Moreno is the CEO and founder of Nexus Management Solutions in Menifee, Calif.

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BATTERY- POWERED EQUIPMENT GUIDE



**THE STATE
OF BATTERY
TECHNOLOGY**

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**INSIDE SEBERT'S
BATTERY JOURNEY**

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Electric landscape land

Advanced battery technology is transforming the commercial landscape and lawn care industry. Discover the innovations changing business models, performance and operational limits for professional contractors

BY MIKE ZAWACKI | CONTRIBUTOR

Advances in technology have accelerated the adoption of battery-powered equipment in the landscape and lawn care industry.



It's often referred to as the "Tesla Effect."

The term describes a rapid, technology-driven transformation that has a profound impact on an established industry. This phenomenon is fueled by a combination of innovation, consumer perception and aggressive vertical integration, with cutting-edge battery technology serving as the foundation.

Recently, the commercial landscape industry has witnessed the emergence of its own Tesla Effect. Simply put, this trend has accelerated the industry's transition away from traditional gas-powered mowers and handheld equipment toward high-performance, battery-powered alternatives.

Recognizing this dramatic shift, landscape equipment leaders are now bringing to market advanced battery-powered product lines.

Greenworks CEO Yin Chen recently credited Tesla with having a profound impact on his company's strategic direction. Chen points to the electric vehicle (EV) manufacturer's success in performance and battery engineering as

setting a higher standard that Greenworks adopted. This led to a "back-to-the-drawing-board" engineering philosophy, which, after a decade, culminated in Greenworks' Optimus line of commercial-grade, battery-powered mowers and handheld equipment.

"Tesla has done a lot to really open people's minds," Chen says of the influence on the next generation of mowers and handheld equipment. "A lot of (Greenworks') ideas and inspiration have come from an understanding of (the Tesla process). I think Tesla didn't only motivate the industry, but it's also inspired our society."

The advent of battery technology is not only influencing equipment manufacturers. Its competitive advantages — including fuel and oil elimination, reduced maintenance, client attraction and employee retention — are challenging professional contractors to reassess their business models and operational dynamics. Ultimately, this technology is forcing the industry to redefine limitations and speculate on the future direction of mower and equipment innovation over the next decade.

VIVA LA REVOLUTION

It wasn't too long ago that battery technology was considered a niche solution, underperforming and suitable only for the less-demanding homeowner market. However, new approaches to engineering lithium-ion battery cells have improved both performance and durability compared to their traditional gas-powered equivalents, says William Rigdon, director of battery and charging technology at Stanley Black and Decker.

"Innovations such as pouch and tabless cell designs, as well as new materials like high-nickel and single-crystal cathodes, conductive additives, ceramic-coated separators and synthetic graphite, have led to batteries with greater power density and longer runtimes and lifespans," Rigdon says.

This scale-up over the last five years has driven down costs while increasing energy density, key factors in making heavy commercial applications like zero-turn mowers and handheld tools technologically and financially feasible for landscape and lawn care professionals.

This transformation is not solely attributable to better batteries but to the synergistic advancement of numerous key technologies within the equipment itself, says Bradley Berkman, a product manager at Milwaukee Tool.

"We always say, 'batteries, motors and electronics,'" Berkman explains. "What has let us push the boundaries of (equipment) performance and application is being able to enhance and drive all three of those technologies forward."

Improvements like enhanced battery management systems, optimized cell chemistries and improved thermal management have boosted the performance and durability of lithium-ion cells for commercial landscape equipment. These advancements include improved energy density,

longer cycle life, faster charging and greater tolerance to temperature fluctuations. Additionally, integrated safety features like overcharge and short-circuit protection further enhance durability.

"If you look at the entire industry, in the last 10 to 15 years, batteries have improved enormously in terms of power longevity and energy density. But if you look at (gas-powered equipment), nothing has really changed," Berkman adds. "So, if you grab a string trimmer from the late 1990s and tear it apart, it's going to have the exact same components that it has today. And from a developmental standpoint, there's such a long runway with battery equipment where we've really seen it continue to



William Rigdon

get better. We don't expect that to slow down any time soon."

Substantial investment by the equipment manufacturing sector has fueled much of the evolution in battery technology, says Ryan Kropfelder, a senior product manager at Stihl.

"The density of power that we're able to put into these (battery) cells, even in the last 10 years, has continued to get better year over year," Kropfelder says. "And manufacturers are making significant engineering investments into the equipment itself. The sophisticated nature of this development means that the battery management systems, these PCBAs (printed circuit board assemblies — intelligent control centers within the battery), the technology within the tools and how the tools communicate with the batteries, it just gets better year over year because we learn more."

SMART POWER

One phrase bandied about in the equipment industry is that "battery power is smart and gas is dumb." This unofficial slogan encapsulates the fundamental advantages of modern, commercial-grade electric equipment over traditional 2- and 4-cycle engines.

According to John Powers, a director of product management at Echo, the most significant opportunity for equipment-driven labor savings lies in autonomous applications. However, he notes that certain jobs requiring human judgment — such as tree trimming, where real-time decisions are necessary — are extremely challenging to automate.

Mowing, however, is the area where autonomous operation is already a reality. Powers says the approach to autonomous mowing taken by various equipment manufacturers — Echo included — has been geared toward

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Bradley Berkman



BATTERY-POWERED EQUIPMENT GUIDE



Team member acceptance of battery-powered equipment has increased in recent years.

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larger-scale applications like sports fields and large properties, rather than the small residential robots seen elsewhere. This technology presents a prime opportunity for labor savings in grounds maintenance, especially for complexes with multiple fields or large expanses of turf. However, it may be less applicable for landscapers focusing solely on residential property maintenance.

The “smart/dumb” phrase also refers to the technological intelligence built into these modern battery-powered systems, and the operational and business intelligence available to the professional contractors who adopt them.

For example, battery-powered equipment depends on advanced charging systems that optimize infrastructure limitations.

“Most contractors are limited to the 15-amp standard outlet,” Stihl’s Kropfelder says. “This creates a challenge to optimize charging and get (batteries) charged as quickly and efficiently as possible.”

The equipment industry has responded to this necessity by introducing systems that transition output from the contractor’s electrical outlets to an intelligent charger that manages power distribution and maximizes delivery to multiple batteries simultaneously. The goal is not to overload

electrical systems during overnight charging while also ensuring the batteries are fully charged and ready to use at the start of the next day.

Numerous equipment providers have also begun addressing the need for smart mobile rapid-charging solutions, which manage on-the-go battery power replenishment directly from the landscape trailer.

According to Kropfelder, the debate about maintenance crews carrying multiple battery packs versus the advantages of mobile charging fewer batteries rests on two factors: the ability to provide power at the jobsite via portable power stations or battery banks and rapid recharge times (10 to 15 minutes). The answer, he concludes, will likely involve a convergence of these two solutions.

“The density of power that we’re able to put into these (battery) cells, even in the last 10 years, has continued to get better year over year. And manufacturers are making significant engineering investments into the equipment itself.”

Ryan Kropfelder

“(The industry) hasn’t cracked the code on this just yet,” Kropfelder says. “But as soon as we can marry those two things together, I think we’ll be able to do that.”

And while artificial intelligence (AI) is expected to play a role in streamlining design and engineering processes, advanced machine learning could be valuable for more effective and efficient equipment operation. This digital infrastructure captures valuable data from tools, providing contractors with details about how long a piece of equipment

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ran and at what RPMs operators were running that equipment. A contractor can then use this data, plug it into an AI system and receive a more efficient workflow model.

“By leveraging sensors and data analytics, machine learning has the potential to support safety features, enable predictive maintenance, enhance fault detection and optimize (equipment) performance,” says Stanley Black and Decker’s Rigdon.

MORE TO COME

Has battery technology arrived at a golden age in its application to landscaping and lawn care equipment? While the question is intriguing, many believe this era is only the beginning.

“Describing the state of battery-powered equipment as being in a ‘golden age’ suggests an end state,” says Powers. “I don’t think that’s where it is. There’s still quite a bit of development to come in the future.”

Innovation in battery technology generally trickles down from other high-tech sectors. Unlike areas such as irrigation or pest and weed control, where technology often flows from agriculture, the advancements relevant to the landscape equipment industry are driven by other sectors that invest heavily in battery development, such as automotive and construction.

While current handheld tool performance is on par with, or in some instances exceeds, that of its gas-powered counterparts, other categories require additional development.

Using battery backpack blowers as an illustration, Powers explains that while their performance is strong, the primary hurdle remains weight and extended runtime, challenges directly linked to battery-pack technology.

“From a pure technology standpoint, we can make a backpack blower that can output the same power as a gas unit with the same runtime,” Powers says. “It’s just too heavy for anybody to use because you need ... probably 30 or 40 pounds worth of batteries.”

As overall battery capacity technology improves across other industry sectors, Powers says these innovations will trickle down for application in professional landscape and lawn care equipment, driving next-generation performance.

In most applications, current handheld battery-powered tool performance is on par with its gas-powered counterparts.



One such advancement is tabless cell technology, which Kropfelder says holds a lot of promise for improving battery-powered equipment. In battery design, tabless cell technology removes the traditional thin metal tabs used to connect the electrodes.

Instead, it utilizes the entire edge of the electrode as a continuous current collector, creating a more direct, lower-resistance path for electricity. This design leads to reduced internal resistance, lower heat generation and higher power output, enabling faster charging and discharging for improved performance in power-demanding tasks such as mowing and landscape maintenance work.

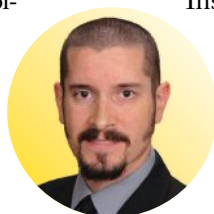
“These cells are much better for heat management, much better at temperature control, and then obviously, they give you better charging speeds, runtimes and power,” Kropfelder says, noting that this technology enhances both performance and safety for users.

Battery-powered performance has not only caught up to gas, but in many product areas, it exceeds it in performance and represents a game-changer for equipment solutions. And it is merely the

beginning, says Per Kvarby, vice president of product management and marketing for the commercial business unit at Greenworks.

“Battery technology is evolving at an unprecedented rate,” Kvarby says. “Within the next two to three years, battery-powered products will significantly surpass

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“Describing the state of battery-powered equipment as being in a ‘golden age’ suggests an end state. I don’t think that’s where it is. There’s still quite a bit of development to come in the future.”

John Powers



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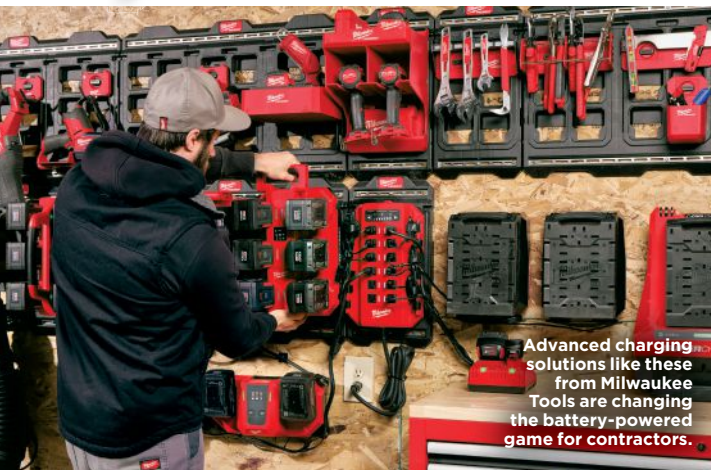
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their gas-powered counterparts. This evolution will be so impactful that landscape contractors will inevitably look back with surprise that they didn't transition sooner."

Manufacturers will continue to push the boundaries of lithium-ion technology, which dates back to the 1990s, to improve durability, longevity and power. And lithium-ion will remain the dominant battery solution for the foreseeable future, Berkman says.

"We're really big believers in lithium-ion," Berkman says. "There are a lot of manufacturing improvements coming down the line for lithium-ion where we're going to be able to continue to drive down cost and make solutions more affordable."

Alternative chemistries are also in play. For example, Rigdon points to lithium-iron phosphate (LFP) and sodium-ion as two being explored for specific applications where lower cost is desired.

"Riding mowers, like (electric vehicles), can benefit from LFP as consumers demand a longer product cycle life and there is often more room for a large battery pack," Rigdon says.

According to Kropfelder, solid-state batteries could represent the next significant advancement in battery technology. Solid-state battery technology utilizes a solid electrolyte (ceramic or polymer), as opposed to the liquid or gel found in traditional lithium-ion batteries. The result is a more energy-dense, faster-charging and longer-lasting power source when compared to conventional battery technology.

"Solid state seems to be the thing that's next in line," Kropfelder says. "However, (the technology) seems to be a little bit far out in terms of cost effectiveness right now." 

Zawacki is a Cleveland-based journalist and frequent contributor who has covered various aspects of the green, horticultural, sports turf and irrigation industries for the last 20 years.

THE SNOW DILEMMA

Historically, cold-weather operations presented significant hurdles for commercial-grade battery-powered equipment.

Managing batteries in sub-zero environments and the sustained power required to push snow and slush have always been a challenge associated with professional snow and ice management. Nevertheless, manufacturers remain committed to developing equipment that enables professionals to complete a full day of work regardless of the climate, whether the user is in Death Valley, Calif., in July or upstate New York during a winter nor'easter.

To meet this commitment, advancements in lithium-ion battery technology are being optimized for snow and ice management work.

"Each new generation of batteries is completely designed from the ground up," says Milwaukee Tool's Bradley Berkman. "A key focus is the durability of internal components for extreme environments, which are necessary because snow application involves water ingress and salt ... all things that are the enemies of batteries."

According to manufacturers, two solutions may enhance battery performance for harsh winter environments. The first improves ingress protection, which shields internal components. This internal defense keeps out moisture and contaminants like salt and water present in demanding winter conditions, ensuring the batteries remain durable while still allowing for rapid charging.

The second issue, cold-weather charging, is being addressed by utilizing high-quality battery cells in high-capacity packs, which will enable the packs to be reliably charged even down to freezing temperatures. This enhanced cold-weather capability is deemed vital for sidewalk crews who perform exhaustive manual labor. Combined, these reliable, powerful and lighter battery tools are expected to be game changers for snow contractors.

"With the new lithium-ion technology, as you discharge them, they generate heat. That's just a function of how they work," says Echo's John Powers. "So, if you keep the battery within its stated temperature range, you actually can use it in pretty cold weather."

However, the trick is storing the equipment at temperatures above freezing, Powers adds.

"If you have a vehicle that's somewhat climate controlled, it doesn't need to be at room temperature, but if it was between 40 to 50 (degrees Fahrenheit), you could take a battery-powered piece of equipment from that condition and place it into pretty cold temperatures, and it'll work fine." — M.Z.



The M18 RedLithium Forge battery pack powers one of Milwaukee Tools' single-stage snowblowers.

PHOTOS: MILWAUKEE TOOLS



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What it takes to go green

As more and more landscape companies opt to 'go green' and implement battery-powered equipment, here's an inside look at how one company did just that, trimming emissions one battery-powered machine at a time **BY SARAH WEBB | CONTRIBUTOR**



Sebert Landscape, a commercial landscape maintenance company, is on a journey to transform its operation into a lean, green, battery-powered machine.

Founded in 1985 by Jeff Sebert, CEO, the company provides commercial landscape maintenance, landscape design and construction and snow removal services, all while putting a strong emphasis on sustainability.

"The biggest reason for switching over to battery power is the sustainability factor, but there's also noise reductions from battery-powered equipment, and we've seen some pretty significant fuel and maintenance savings over the last couple of years," says Ryan Wellnitz, equipment manager at Sebert Landscape.

Wellnitz provides insight into how the company, headquartered in Bartlett, Ill., plans to push battery power throughout its entire operation.

LAYING THE FOUNDATION

The plan to implement battery power was not without foresight. After all, when a company boasts more than 600 employees and nine regional branch offices across Chicago-land, southeastern Wisconsin and south-central Wisconsin, a well-thought-out plan is essential for success.

Before it invested in battery-powered equipment, the company had to ensure the electrical infrastructure was in place.

This included updating the amount of power running into the facilities and yards and working with power companies to add more transformers to its yards.

"One thing that sets Sebert apart is that we own all of our properties," Wellnitz says. "This greatly helps cut the red tape in converting to (an electric-powered) site."

With the help of a local electrician, the company also converted its traditional landscape trailers to electric

vehicle (EV) trailers by implementing on-board charging systems, manufactured by Gravelly.

Within the trailers, which charge at the company's facilities each night, there are three 20-amp breakers that can charge three mowers along with each crew's handheld equipment.

"(With the trailers), we can not only charge our handheld equipment in the field during the day, but we also have battery reserves for any EV mowers in the field if we need any extra juice at any time during the day," Wellnitz says. "Plus, this way, we don't have to take any of the equipment out of the trailers at night."

As of now, the company has 30 EV trailers, complementing the fleet's 192 Gravelly mowers, with plans to convert more as other branches within the company adopt electric. In fact, with the next branch it converts, Sebert Landscape will add 20 additional EV trailers to its fleet, Wellnitz says.

Wellnitz acknowledges it took some time to perfect the charging setup for the trailers, especially with the first branch that made the transition. Over time, the process became easier.

"Once we got that figured out, it was pretty much hands off after that," Wellnitz says. "As we switch over each branch, we've had a lot of lessons learned."

LITTLE BY LITTLE

Instead of switching all crews to battery-powered equipment right away, Sebert is making the change bit by bit by handling one branch at a time. The initiative began with the company's main branch in Bartlett, Ill.

At this point, Sebert has switched about 25 percent of its operations to battery power, according to Wellnitz, and four

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out of the company's nine branches have been converted, with a fifth to make the transition in early 2026.

The switch includes equipment such as mowers, string trimmers and some blowers, although the company is slower to transition gas-powered blowers to battery-powered ones.

"A lot of companies have developed electric backpack blowers, but they're just not quite as powerful as the gas ones yet," Wellnitz says.

Over the next several years, Sebert Landscape plans to transition the rest of its operation to battery power. As the season begins for 2026, about 34 percent of the mower fleet will be EV, and all the crews that have EV mowers will have electric handheld equipment.

While the decision to convert to battery power initially revolved around sustainability efforts, the transition also comes amid growing pressure within U.S. cities to limit gas power, Wellnitz says.

"We're seeing a lot of municipalities passing legislation to ban certain gas-powered equipment. It's especially true in coastal areas," Wellnitz says. "It's not so much an issue in the Chicagoland area yet, but I foresee it coming here soon."

Reduced overall maintenance costs in the long run also played a factor in the decision to embrace battery power.

In the coming months, Wellnitz, who began at the company earlier this year, says he's looking forward to digging into how much the battery power transition has saved the company over the long run — not only in fuel, but also in maintenance costs.

"Already, we've saved a lot in terms of gallons of propane to power the mowers, and the reduction in maintenance costs is huge," says Wellnitz, citing not only the cost of mechanical labor to repair equipment, but also the cost of replacement parts and the cost of downtime while waiting for equipment to be repaired.

Finally, there also have been some

beneficial side effects to switching to battery power. For example, crew members enjoy less noise and no exhaust fumes by using battery-powered equipment.

"Our employees have also found that the equipment is easier to start than gas equipment — you have immediate run time with electric equipment, and we are not trying to pull-start equipment over and over again," Wellnitz says. "There's also no gas to mix, no greasing of the machines, no oils, filters or spark plugs to change and no belts to maintain."

WORDS TO THE WISE

For other companies looking to make the change to battery power, Wellnitz recommends first choosing a trusted manufacturer that offers strong support.

"We have a really good relationship with our manufacturer. We can call them on the phone, and whether we need tech support or even boots on the ground, they're willing to jump in, help us tackle the issue and come up with a long-term solution," Wellnitz says.

The next step, Wellnitz says, is that landscape companies should provide adequate training for employees in the field. This move can help clear up crew members' preconceived notions about the equipment.

"Crews are used to gas-powered handheld equipment, so when you first introduce them to the new equipment, they might say something like, 'This doesn't have enough power,' or 'The batteries won't last,' so that's why we do pretty extensive training with them," Wellnitz says.

For its training sessions, the company sets up a ride-and-drive obstacle course so employees can become familiar with the machine as well as stations pertaining to different aspects of the equipment. Stations include topics such as:

- How to change and sharpen blades.
- How to plug in the mowers inside the trailer.
- How to plug in the trailer to store power for overnight charging.
- Mower safety features.

Finally, Wellnitz says it's essential that everyone within a company embraces the change to battery-powered equipment in order for it to be successful.

"The initial investment upfront is huge, but the one thing you really have to focus on is the long-term gains and remember that you're buying your fuel and equipment upfront," Wellnitz says. "And then also think of the long-term vision of supporting sustainability and reducing greenhouse gases." 

Four of Sebert Landscape's nine branches have converted to electric equipment, with a fifth set to switch in 2026.



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FIVE QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW BY SETH JONES | LM EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Tony Sellers

**PRESIDENT, SELLERS SERVICES INC.
ROCHESTER, IND.**

1 How did Sellers Services get its start?

I was a union laborer, doing road construction, which I enjoyed. I was going to school at night for landscaping and trying to learn more about the business. When my son was born, it made me want to move back home to where I was from — I missed the small town and wanted to be closer to family. One of my dad's friends had five lawn accounts and heard that I was wanting to start a lawn care business. I went out and got a Toro credit card before quitting my job to ensure I had enough credit before I quit — and I left my job. That's how it started. I took care of those clients, I actually still work for three of those five today and, honestly, the other two passed away. It's nice to know that these clients have stuck with us that long.

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

Equipment-wise, we use mostly Echo and Scag for our lawn care. Those are probably our two biggest brand names we use. And then for me as an owner, probably my biggest tool is our CRM. We use Asset, and I like that it takes care of our accounting, job costing, scheduling, etc., all in one program. We don't have to use other programs for accounting, and we're super excited about its new cloud platform called Include Go.

3 Do you have a most memorable day at work?

I'm very, very passionate about what I do. I think being in the landscape business, it's a tough business, especially in the seasonal market where you have a time period to get things done. I think my biggest issue is I do enjoy what I do. Coming home at night and complaining that I had a long day is probably just because I need to do that to make it sound bad, but in all honesty, I probably spent the extra time because I enjoy the business 100 percent.

4 What's your expectation for 2026?

Our company has more than doubled in size in the past few years. Our goal is \$4.7 million this year, but our 10-year-plan is \$10 million. We have implemented EOS in our business which gives us structure from a management and accountability standpoint. We especially enjoy being a part of an Ace Peer Group. We are located in a small community where the population here is 1,500

residents full time and ramps up to around 4,500 in the summer. Most of our clients are seasonal lake homes. Being in a small rural area, we are not focused on a whole bunch of trucks and people. Having a good bottom line is more important to us, so we are focused on client relationships and offering a high-end service. We don't want to lose that as we grow in our market, but we know that we have to grow to ensure we are creating opportunity for our team members to grow themselves. Working with McFarlin Stanford and The Grow Group has helped us uncover some ideas — things that are possible in our area — without adding another location. It gives us that hope and excitement, and we just have to work the plan to get there.

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

I have four children. My two oldest, Brandon and Brooklyn, they're in the business right now, which is great. And then I have two younger children, 8 and 10 years old, that I have with my wife Kelly. We purchased the farm from my dad which is about 60 acres and has been in our family for a few generations. I've been developing the back of the farm and am currently in the process of a new home design. We have our own backyard paradise which includes about 7 acres of water. We love four-wheeling, fishing and just being outdoors. I love taking the kids back there and just having fun. With my two oldest being in the business, I get to spend a lot of time with them that I honestly didn't spend in the beginning. But I've also learned from them, too. I'm spending a lot more time with my young children, and I have that time that I didn't have when I first started the company because I was more about business. I love my family, and everything's great! 🍷

PHOTO: LM STAFF



BEST ADVICE
“Don't waste time. No matter what size you are, you should start thinking big.”

REPEAT THE PROCESS

#34

Creating a clear playbook helped LMC Landscape Partners to grow organically and through acquisitions BY LAUREN H. DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR

Building processes that can be repeated on a large scale allowed LMC Landscape Partners in Plano, Texas, to recreate their success at new branches as they expanded, says Trey Brock, CEO and a partner at LMC.

The company offers a full slate of services to its customers, including commercial landscape maintenance, landscape enhancements, lawn care, design/build and irrigation. It also has programs focused on seasonal color, water management, storm response, tree care services and landscape construction for select commercial properties.

Providing a one-stop solution for their clients helped LMC Landscape Partners reach No. 34 on *Landscape Management's* 2025 LM150 list of the industry's top revenue-generating firms with \$108.85 million in annual revenue.

FIND THE RIGHT FIT

One avenue for LMC's growth has been through acquisitions, Brock says. It has expanded into key Sun Belt markets and is intentional about choosing its partners, looking for companies with strong local reputations, recurring maintenance work and a good cultural fit.

"That gave us immediate revenue and presence in key markets," Brock says. "Our branch teams did a great job of holding onto and growing existing relationships while we layered in acquisitions that aligned well with our culture and business model."

LMC also tightened up its operations across the board, putting in standardized reporting, branch scorecards

and consistent leadership rhythms. Brock says that gave the company visibility and accountability as it grew.

The company also invested heavily in its team, from onboarding and training to leadership development, allowing them to scale without losing the local touch, he says.

STAY CONSISTENT

Whenever a company grows quickly, there are always new hurdles and lessons to learn. For Brock and his team, one big takeaway was the importance of planning for the integration before they closed a deal, not after.

LMC worked on maintaining consistency across that growing portfolio to strengthen communication, enhance training and align processes across all its branches.

"What worked when we had three branches doesn't cut it with 15," Brock says. "We had to be much more deliberate about cadence, clarity and accountability."

For example, the company set up a structured call for its branch managers, regional leaders and executive team. The team has also gone all in with their commitment to operational software and a migration to a more robust enterprise resource planning (ERP) system.

"It's giving us better visibility and more consistent reporting, which really helps us manage a multi-branch, multi-state platform," Brock says.

Looking ahead, Brock says LMC plans to continue growing through a mix of strategic acquisitions and strong organic performance, but



technology will play a larger role. It will also focus on safety, training and leadership development to support that growth.

"As we deepen our presence in existing markets and add adjacent services, it's all about creating more value for clients and opportunities for our people," he says.

BUILD A STRONG BASE

Brock encourages other professionals to create a solid foundation for their company before trying to scale it. That includes ensuring company financials are clean and processes are repeatable.

"Growth exposes every weakness, so the stronger your base, the more sustainable your growth will be," Brock says.

Helping to form that culture is LMC's dedicated team. Everyone from the field crews to the managers and support teams has played an important role in their growth.

"It's a combination of a clear strategy, disciplined execution and a strong culture," Brock says. "We're building something that's not just growing fast but growing the right way for the long term." 📌

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.



Trey Brock



BY JUSTIN WHITE

The author is the CEO of K&D Landscaping in Watsonville, Calif. He can be reached at justin@kndlandscaping.com.

Why 2026 will be the year of the disruptor

In 2026, the landscaping industry will be reshaped by technological advancements, shifting labor dynamics and increasing client expectations. The companies that thrive won't be the ones that adjust; they'll be the ones who disrupt.

DISRUPTORS WRITE THE RULES

In January 2025, my company made the leap to go fully electric with Kress equipment for our maintenance division. That one move changed everything.

Soon after, one of the homeowner associations we maintain went out to bid but added a twist. This time, the RFP required that all bidders provide 100-percent electric services. Their covenants, conditions and restrictions (CC&R) and fiduciary policies required them to solicit bids, but due to the electric requirement, our competition dropped off quickly. We didn't win by lowering the price; we won by rewriting the rules.

That's disruption in action. When you move early and build the model of the future, everyone else has to catch up.

DISRUPTION IS A MUSCLE

Disruptors don't chase shiny objects; they build change into their DNA. That means constantly evolving, then simplifying what works so it can scale.

At K&D Landscaping, we've made a couple fundamental shifts over the years to evolve quickly. For example:

- We elevated from a traditional "core values" model to something more robust, which we call The K&D Way: 30 fundamentals that guide how we lead, serve and grow. Things like "speak straight," "practice blameless problem solving"



- and "have each other's backs."
- Most recently, we changed our operating system from the Entrepreneurial Operating System (EOS) to Leanscaper. That wasn't just a tweak; it was a core rewire of how we run our business. It's working because we've trained our team to embrace change, not fear it.

WHY MOST COMPANIES STRUGGLE WITH CHANGE

Here's the truth: Most companies aren't wired to change. They centralize decisions at the top. They avoid risk. They protect legacy systems and outdated norms. And when challenged, they will often say, "But we've always done it that way."

But in a world where speed matters, that mindset is dangerous. Disruptors do the opposite:

- They decentralize decision-making to increase velocity.
- They create a culture where experimentation is safe and expected.
- They focus on innovation, not preservation.

THE NEW FACE OF THE LANDSCAPE INDUSTRY

Three forces are reshaping the landscape industry. If you're not already adapting to these, now is the time:

- 1. AI is changing how we sell, schedule and make decisions.**

From estimating to client communication, AI tools are becoming the new backend engine.

- 2. Battery-powered equipment is no longer a compromise.** Performance now rivals gas, and the environmental benefits are tipping the scales in client conversations.

- 3. Robotics is arriving faster than expected.** Especially on large maintenance sites, autonomous equipment is set to change the labor equation.

It's not that one of these new technologies will shift the industry on its own. It's the fact that all three of them are advancing together that is giving birth to the greatest disruptive event we have ever seen.

THE FUTURE BELONGS TO THOSE WHO EXPERIMENT

If your systems, structure or model were built for yesterday's market (and most were), it's time to rethink them. Take these three actions this week to determine where you and your company stand:

- 1. Audit your model.** Is your current business model built for the next five years or just surviving today?

- 2. Pick one technology to test.** Whether it's battery, AI or automation, start experimenting in a small, measurable way.

- 3. Empower a team to lead change.** Build a cross-functional "innovation group" to own your next big evolution.

At K&D, we're still evolving. That's why I launched The Disruptors, an online community for landscapers serious about leading the next chapter of our industry. It's where we share strategies, test ideas and challenge each other to think differently.

And in 2026, the disruptors will be the ones who win. 🏆



BY BOB MANN

The author is the director of state and local government relations for the National Association of Landscape Professionals. Reach him at Bob@landscapeprofessionals.org.

The promise — and perils — of AI

I am what's known as a "late adopter" of technology. I have no idea how this happened; perhaps I am curmudgeonly ("Get off my lawn!"), or maybe I've gotten used to doing things a certain way that did not involve the latest and greatest gadget.

For instance, my smartphone is an iPhone 12 Mini that will only be pried from my cold, dead fingers once Apple stops supporting the software. I do not need to carry a big screen TV in my pocket.

But the real reason is probably my philosophy that you should never automate something that you cannot expertly do manually. Here's an example: Back before there were companies selling lawn care software, I developed my own record-keeping database using off-the-shelf software. It was nothing fancy, but it worked. However, before I designed the computer database, I designed the manual version — pencil and paper — so I knew what I wanted to do and, more importantly, what I wanted to avoid.

Such is the case with the current craze over artificial intelligence (an oxymoron if there ever was one). I experienced two instances recently in which AI proved to be not ready for prime time. The first was last spring's launch of the MAHA Report, the brainchild of U.S. Secretary of Health and Human Services Robert F. Kennedy Jr.

Now, I think we can all agree that there are issues pertaining to public health that need to be improved, and it falls upon leaders in public policy to articulate a convincing argument to motivate the public to action.

“AI has the potential to enhance a person's underlying expertise, but not to replace years of education and experience.”

Unfortunately, the MAHA Report was rife with the kind of errors that would have your high school science teacher excoriating you in front of the entire class if you had tried getting away with them. Here's a pro tip: If you cite a research paper to make your case, someone might check out that reference. But if you rely too heavily on AI for your report, you might find that research paper does not actually exist or does not support the point being argued.

The upshot of all this is twofold. First, AI isn't always particularly intelligent. Second, a great deal of goodwill and credibility can be lost by allowing such a slipshod report to see the light of day.

The second example arose while preparing to meet with a member of Congress recently. We have been targeting members of the House and Senate Agriculture Committees to argue for passage of provisions in the Farm Bill. Like any good retail political effort, we tap association members — in this case, a good friend of mine — living in that congressional district to be part of the meetings. We wanted to discuss a point of pesticide policy that was really in the weeds, so my friend wanted to study some background information on those issues, which I promptly sent over.

What happened next surprised even cynical old me. He fed the background information into one of the AI engines with a prompt to summarize it. The engine dutifully spit out its result, which was exactly the opposite argument that we intended to make. If we had provided the member of Congress with that AI-generated material, it would have completely undermined our effort. It was a good thing that another friend attending the meeting read the document carefully and identified the problem.

Which leads me to my point: While AI can be a valuable tool, it can also be used improperly, just like any other tool. A hammer can be used to build a beautiful home, but it can also be used to flatten your thumb if you don't have good aim (do not ask me how I know this). AI has the potential to enhance a person's underlying expertise, but not to replace years of education and experience.

No matter how powerful the computer is, a human being still needs to evaluate the finished product to ensure that it makes sense. 🛠️





BY PHIL HARWOOD, ESQ.

The author is an attorney with Tamarisk Legal Advisors, a senior advisor with Tamarisk Business Advisors and Snow Commander with the Snowfighters Institute.

Engaging the next generation in business succession

As the Great Wealth Transfer continues, many business owners are facing a difficult reality: None of their heirs are interested in taking over the family business, leaving the owner with a choice between selling their business to a nonfamily member or liquidating.

This reality may come as a surprise to some owners, as they assumed that their children or grandchildren would naturally jump at the opportunity to take over the family business. Other owners are not at all surprised because their heirs already have careers outside of the family business.

My story provides a real-life illustration. My grandfather — “Gramps” — founded an advertising business in 1940. The business thrived under his leadership and provided handsomely for him and his family. Two of Gramps’ four sons worked in the business while the other two chose other careers. But not one of his grandchildren chose to pursue a career in the family business. Sadly, the business failed to make it to the third generation.

Gramps loved being surrounded by family and having a family business. But he didn’t know how to give up control until it was too late. My father worked for Gramps most of his career but left the business late in his career when he realized that there was no succession plan and that Gramps was not going to give up the business until he drew his last breath. My uncle wound up the business several years later after it slowly died on the vine.

I was actively involved in the business growing up. Gramps and I had a great relationship all of those

years. However, Gramps and I never had a conversation about me working in the family business. As a result, I had no interest in the family business as a career because the business was never structured to allow for that to happen. There was no vision for the second generation to take over, let alone the third generation. It was never even a consideration for me.

Thankfully, there are other family businesses that provide successful examples for family business succession. One of these examples is Bissell, based in my hometown of Grand Rapids, Mich. Bissell has been making vacuums and small appliances since 1876. With annual revenue of almost \$700 million, according to ZoomInfo, the privately held family business recently stepped into fifth-generation leadership.

Most interestingly, Mark Bissell, the company’s fourth-generation chairman and CEO, who transitioned into a role as executive chairman of the board in September, told *Family Business* magazine in 2013 that he had been working on a succession plan. At the time, his children were 18, 25 and 27. That was 12 years ago. Mark said, “To have a family business continue, you have to have family in the business. You must create a level of excitement and desire while ensuring that there’s the capacity and ambition to do it right.”

As I reflect on this, both from my own experience and by considering



successful multigenerational family businesses, a few key takeaways are present.

First, develop a vision for successive generations and communicate this vision. My grandfather never shared such a vision. On the other hand, Mark Bissell shared his vision with a trade magazine — essentially telling the world about it.

Second, begin the engagement process early. Mark Bissell shared his vision 12 years before the vision came to fruition. The next generation wasn’t ready at that time to take over the business. They needed to develop and mature.

Third, take proactive steps to engage the next generation. Mark Bissell talked about “creating a level of excitement and desire.” My grandfather never took any steps in this direction.

Planning for succession is best done early in the life of a business. It’s a huge mistake to begin planning for multigenerational succession after it’s too late, a mistake that is difficult to overcome. If you’re a business owner, now is the time to get started on your succession plan.

Now go forth.

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RESOURCES

[BIG OL' SMILE]

A positive change

This month's "Good news" feature follows FineTurf's charity golf tournament to raise money for kids in need. But what else is the industry doing for others?

If you know of any ways the landscaping industry is making a positive impact, we want to hear about it! Email Editor-in-Chief Scott Hollister (shollister@northcoastmedia.net) and Associate Editor Nathan Mader (nmader@northcoastmedia.net) with your good news for a chance to be featured in a future edition of *LM*!



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GROW WITH GRUNDER

BY MARTY GRUNDER

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Give yourself a present this holiday season

Well folks, we made it. It's the final month of the year, and we're ready to look ahead to 2026.

At this time of year, when my kids were young, "The Night Before Christmas" was a popular bedtime story each night. In it, there's the famous line, "It was the night before Christmas and all through the house; not a creature was stirring, not even a mouse."

I think for many years, this line could've applied to our offices at Grunder Landscaping Co. at this time of year, too. As the landscaping season wound down, we would lay off our production crews for the winter, and our sales and administrative teams would wind down their work, too.

Today, that's different as we keep our crews busy with a combination of winter work like brush removal, hardscaping, equipment maintenance and snow and ice mitigation when storms come through. But these winter months are also the perfect time to work on your business. We set aside winter projects knowing that our team will have more time and brainpower to devote to it.

Here are three things we're working on this winter.

REFRESHING OUR HORTICULTURAL TRAINING

Our production teams are collaborating to put into writing our horticultural calendar. The goal is to transfer the knowledge of our most experienced horticulturalists into an Excel sheet that the entire team can reference.

“We set aside winter projects knowing that our team will have more time and brainpower to devote to it.”

We're also working on adapting the way we train our maintenance teams by getting our most senior team leaders working alongside more crews so that they can train them in 2026. While our weekly team-leader training is valuable, we know we need to invest more in training our team to maintain our quality standard.

REALIGNING OUR SALES STRUCTURE

A key benefit of growing our business is it allows our salespeople to specialize rather than having to be a jack-of-all-trades, selling any type of work that comes in. We've separated our salespeople into specializations (i.e., maintenance versus design/build), but as the company grows, we're defining this specialization even more narrowly.

In 2026, each salesperson will focus on one specific division to improve efficiency and streamline communication — commercial maintenance, residential maintenance, design/build and commercial bid-build.

We're working on implementing this change this winter, which includes transferring some clients between salespeople, and we are collaborating with our sales team to look for other ways we can help them focus more on what they do best.

CREATING NEW DESIGN PALETTES

While we don't want to stifle creativity among our team, we've found that as we've grown and there are more people who are designing work, we're losing some efficiency by not having a consistent plant palette.

This winter, our experienced horticulturalists and installers are working with our designers to refine our palette. We won't be overly restrictive, but these will become our recommended standards.

The biggest reason we're doing this? We found that we were specifying varieties of plants that were different but very similar. It made it difficult for our teams to identify plants when needed and was an unnecessary complication for procurement. If we simplify our choices, it makes it easier for our team to manage inventory and replace plants that die.

Ideas on what to focus our time and energy on this winter have come in part from seeing the issues we ran into throughout the growing season and from getting outside of our business. Being around other pros at industry events like GROW! 2026 is a great way to find more projects to do in the slower season.

Will I see you in Dallas on Feb. 10-12 for that event? Check out our agenda and learn more at grow-groupinc.com/grow-2026. 

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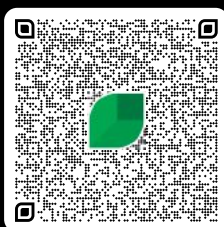


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