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STATE OF THE INDUSTRY REPORT

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[LM GROWTH SUMMIT]

How did it go?

Did you attend our LM Growth Summit in December? If so, what did you think? What were your big takeaways, and how can we improve it next year? Let us know your thoughts for a chance to be included in LM's Growth Summit recap by emailing Editorial Director Seth Jones (sjones@northcoastmedia.net) or Editor-in-Chief Scott Hollister (shollister@northcoastmedia.net).



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SCOTT HOLLISTER
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Fresh faces to help level up *LM*

When the televised sports schedule runs dry and there aren't any new episodes of *The Real Housewives* to watch (I'll let you guess which one of us watches which), my wife and I often turn the television to HGTV and let episodes of *House Hunters* or *House Hunters International* take over our evenings.

It's a pretty decent compromise, because both of us find something to like in those shows. We also find plenty to laugh about ... or more precisely, to laugh at ... while watching couples argue about garages, closet space and carpeting versus hardwood floors.

It's all in good fun, of course, and I know for a fact that show participants are strongly encouraged to, um, "emphasize" any disagreements about design tastes or finances for the sake of the storyline — a friend of a friend appeared on an episode and confirmed my suspicion.

Knowing that, however, doesn't stop me from getting mildly annoyed every time one of the show's stars whines about the need to gut a perfectly functional, relatively modern bathroom or kitchen before they'd even consider putting in an offer on the home. I come from the school of "If It Ain't Broke, Don't Fix It," so watching these first-time home buyers confuse their wants with their needs always sets me off just a little bit.

Unfortunately, it also highlights a little of my own hypocrisy and the 180 I take when it comes to my professional life and the magazines I've been lucky enough to manage over my career.

“We knew there was room to grow, to improve and to bring even more to you. ... We knew we could take things to a whole other level.”

In those instances, I can't wait to fix things that aren't broken and try new things, even when the finished product we're delivering each month already regularly plays to rave reviews.

And that's definitely the case with *Landscape Management*. The magazine that I joined last April was a clear industry leader with a stable of regular contributors who were respected voices in landscaping and lawn care. Readers relied on the magazine to help make their businesses more efficient and more profitable.

But Seth Jones, *LM*'s editorial director, and I knew we could do even more. We knew there was room to grow, to improve and to bring even more to you. We knew we could take things to a whole other level.

This month, you'll get your first look at that all-new level as we welcome two new columnists to the *LM* family who bring a wealth of real-world industry experience and expertise to the table.

First up is Bryan Christiansen, the chief executive officer for the Mariani Premier Group, which ranked No. 7 on our 2024 *LM*150 listing of the top 150 revenue-generating companies in the industry. In his new bimonthly column, *Green Industry MBA*, Christiansen will share business insights focused on growth, mergers

and acquisitions and the proven tips and techniques that have made Mariani one of the fastest-growing companies in the business. You can find Christiansen's first column for *LM* on page 44.

Our other new columnist is a longtime friend of the magazine — Tito Caceres, the managing director at Bloom Talent Solutions. Caceres has been a go-to source on staffing and human resource matters for *LM*, so we thought, "Why not give him his own column?"

And that's what we did. In *Blooming Talent*, he'll offer advice and suggestions about how landscape and lawn care companies can overcome labor challenges and manage their teams in ways that benefit both employees and employers. Caceres' column will appear quarterly and debuts this month on page 47.

And Christiansen and Caceres aren't the only new faces we're looking to add to our stellar group of columnists that already included industry luminaries like Marty Grunder and Jeffrey Scott. We have several other irons in the fire that will solidify our place as the magazine of choice for landscape professionals, so stay tuned for more big announcements.

While *LM* is clearly no fixer upper, it's hard to argue that the fresh faces we're adding to our roster will put a new shine on the work we do every month. We hope you'll agree and that you'll enjoy the perspectives that Christiansen and Caceres — and all our outstanding contributors — bring to the magazine. 🍷



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EDITORIAL ADVISORY BOARD



MORE ONLINE

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

What's your best tip for starting a new year off on the right foot?

"The best way to start the year off is with a focused agenda on what you will do to get better. I have all of my personal, family, health, company and financial goals laid out, and those who are a part of those goals know what they are. We are in sync, and I have hired a coach to help me. Nothing is better than clarity

of purpose and a good plan ... take that and get to work!"



Landscape Professionals

Richard Bare

Arbor-Nomics Turf
Norcross, Ga.

Troy Clogg

Troy Clogg Landscape Associates
Wixom, Mich.

Pam Dooley

Plants Creative Landscapes
Decatur, Ga.

Paul Fraynd

Sun Valley Landscaping
Omaha, Neb.

Mike Haynes

The Loving Companies
Charlotte, N.C.

Luke Henry

ProScope Lawn &
Landscaping Services
Marion, Ohio

Chris Joyce

Joyce Landscaping
Cape Cod, Mass.

Aaron Katerberg

Grapids Irrigation
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Jerry McKay

McKay Landscape Lighting
Omaha, Neb.

Bryan Stolz

Winterberry Landscape
& Garden Center
Southington, Conn.

Greg Winchel

Winchel Irrigation
Grandville, Mich.

Industry Consultants

Neal Glatt

Grow the Bench
Boston, Mass.

Marty Grunder

The Grow Group
Dayton, Ohio

Phil Harwood

Tamarisk Business Advisors
Grand Rapids, Mich.

Jeffrey Scott

Jeffrey Scott Consulting
New Orleans, La.



"One of my favorite quotes comes to mind: 'Success is where preparation and opportunity

meet.' Opportunities abound in our industry — start preparing now! Connect with clients, gear up for the spring sales rush and ensure your production teams are 100-percent ready. Spring is just weeks away!"

"Talk to as many of your people as possible and ask them how they would make things better for the new year. You never know where your next big idea will come from, and increasing engagement is one of the best ways to drive retention on your team."



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

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LM GALLERY

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

1 A couple of lovely couples At the 2025 ACS Summit in New Orleans, we saw Vince Torchia, vice president, The Grow Group, and his wife Skylar (left) with Greg Herring, founder and CEO, The Herring Group, and his wife Pat.

2 All aboard! During the ACE Summit, the group took a riverboat tour. Ready to set sail are (left to right) Steve Scarsella, president, Brothers Services; Chase Coates, president, Outback Landscape; Jason Cromley, owner, Hidden Creek Landscaping; Forrest Bowen, president and CEO, MBL Inc.; and Torchia. The bartender who photobombed us? Well, we can't explain that one.

3 The Ryans and the Joneses A nice way to wrap up a successful 2024 — Larry Ryan and his wife Kathy (left) met up with LM's Seth Jones and his family — left to right, Evey, Adrienne and Boyd in the Spider-Man hoodie — for lunch at their favorite Mexican restaurant in Baldwin City, Kan., El Patron.

4 Sneak preview Members of the industry press got an inside look at John Deere's work to bring autonomous solutions to a variety of industries — including landscaping — during an event in Gilroy, Calif., in November. This stand-on mower is one of the equipment prototypes officially unveiled this month at CES 2025 in Las Vegas.

5 The award goes to ... The Most Innovative ACE Award was presented to Bret Schmitz, owner, CFO, and Robyn Schmitz, owner/founder/CEO, High Prairie Outdoor, Kansas City, Kan. Their trophy is a mini Chris Pscencik cut-out. That'll look good on the mantle!

6 Riverboat buds (Left to right) Andy DuBois, CFO, Miracle Farms Landscaping; James Cali, founding principal, McFarlin Stanford; and Hayden Maroun, senior vice president, Miracle Farms





Landscaping, took time for a photo as the ACE Summit cruise wrapped up.

7 Big views of the Big Easy (Left to right) Chase Campbell, Fallaize Insurance Agency; Cal Fallaize, Fallaize Insurance Agency; and Nate Negrin, SouthernEEZ Landscaping, enjoyed the ACE Summit riverboat cruise with the New Orleans city skyline as their backdrop.

8 We meet again The last time Adrianne and Seth Jones (left) hung out with Levi and Jessica Duckett, Sunshine Landscape, they were all in Italy. Ducketts, let's keep meeting up in these beautiful locations, OK?

9 Mardi Gras spirit Hats off to Tommy Cole (left), vice president, McFarlin Stanford, and Ryan Boyd (second from left), owner, Twisted Vines Lawn and Landscaping, for showing that Mardi Gras spirit. They're pictured with Tony Distefano (second



from right), president, Angelo's Landscape Group, and Jason Dill (right), landscape architect and design + build director, Angelo's Landscape Group.

10 Another couple of lovely couples (Left to right) Nate Jensen, owner, Jensen Gardens, and Jim Egan, owner, Land Design Associates, with their better halves, Jen Egan and Jamie Jensen.

11 Happy holidays! Most of the *Landscape Management* team got together in front of a giant Christmas tree for our holiday card. Seth is in front, with (left to right) Jake Goodman, Sydney Fischer, Scott Hollister, Bill Roddy, Craig MacGregor, Nathan Mader (seated), Rob DiFranco, Payton Szymczak, Nader Hassen and Pete Seltzer.

John Deere reveals updated autonomous technology

BY SCOTT HOLLISTER | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Amid the glitz and glamour of Las Vegas, and on the floor of America's largest trade show, John Deere pulled back the curtain on a host of autonomous advances in early January that it hopes will be a key to solving workforce challenges in several industries, including commercial landscaping.

At CES 2025 in Las Vegas, Deere showcased its second-generation autonomous kit and several machines outfitted with the new technology, including an autonomous, battery-powered stand-on commercial mower. The technology is also being tested on two pieces of agricultural equipment — a 9RX tractor used in tillage and a 5ML orchard tractor — and the 460 P-Tier articulated dump truck used in construction and quarries.

In November, before the launch at CES 2025, industry media got a sneak

peek at the new technology during an event at Blue River Technology's (a John Deere company) test facility in Gilroy, Calif.

"Our agriculture, construction and commercial landscaping customers all have work that must get done at certain times of the day and year, yet there is not enough available and skilled labor to do the work," said Jahmy Hindman, chief technology officer at John Deere. "Autonomy can help address this challenge."

The autonomy kit was first showcased at CES 2022. The second-generation autonomy kit combines advanced computer vision, AI and cameras to help the machines navigate their environments. Select machines will be autonomy-ready from the factory, and the second-generation perception system will be available as a retrofit kit for certain other machines, providing



John Deere debuted several pieces of autonomous equipment at CES 2025, including a prototype of an autonomous, battery-powered stand-on commercial mower.

customers with multiple paths to adoption based on where they are in their technology journey.

The machines are managed via John Deere Operations Center Mobile, the company's cloud-based platform. Through the app, the machine can be started once placed in the appropriate spot. Users also have access to live video, images, data and metrics and the ability to adjust various factors like speed.

For more on John Deere's next second-generation autonomy kit, see [LandscapeManagement.net](https://www.LandscapeManagement.net). @

HUNTER INDUSTRIES STALWART HOVELN DIES

Steve HovelN, a long-time Hunter Industries team member and respected figure in the green industry, has died. He was 65.

HovelN joined the green industry in 1978 at age 19, working for an Arizona landscape company before moving to Colorado two years later to work for CPS Distributors. In January 1990, he was recruited to Hunter Industries. Over the next 34 years, HovelN excelled in a variety of roles at the global irrigation manufacturer — from sales and field management to product management and marketing — ultimately becoming the company's expert on commercial rotors and valves.

Throughout his career, HovelN made significant contributions to Hunter's product lineup and helped

advance the irrigation industry in meaningful ways. He was instrumental in the redesign of Hunter's popular PGJ Rotor as well as the launch of the company's Blue Nozzles for the best-selling PGP Rotor.

HovelN also spearheaded the release of Hunter's first pressure-regulated sprinkler body, designed specifically for the PGP and I-20 Rotors to deliver water-efficient performance. This product has since become integral to Hunter's environmentally conscious portfolio. Additionally, HovelN was a dedicated corporate ambassador, generously sharing his vast product knowledge and industry expertise with all who visited Hunter.



Steve HovelN

2024 ACE Peer Groups Summit honors members

BY SETH JONES | LM EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

The eighth annual ACE Summit event took place in New Orleans in November, with more than 170 landscape and lawn care professionals — and many of their spouses — in attendance. The event offered attendees more than 30 educational seminars, an awards dinner, a VIP tour of the National World War II Museum and a private Mississippi River dinner jazz cruise on the Creole Queen.

The ACE Summit, co-hosted by McFarlin Stanford and The Grow Group, is the one event of the year where all the various peer group members come together. A “State of ACE” presentation is held, letting the room know how many groups there now are and what the plans are for the future. Currently, there are 19 active peer groups, with two new ones about to start. In all, there are more than 250 members of ACE Peer Groups.

Vince Torchia, vice president of The Grow Group, shared that the collective revenue of the lawn care and landscape companies in ACE Peer Groups totaled over \$1.5 billion.

“You plot that against *Landscape Management’s* LM150 (list of the industry’s 150 largest companies), and we finally overtook TruGreen for the third spot, collectively, for the ACE Peer Groups program,” Torchia told the room. “That’s a very cool thing for us.”

At the awards dinner, eight companies were recognized with awards. The awards are small full-body cut-outs of the presenter of the award. This year’s awards went to:

ACE of the Year: Jeffrey Johns, Coastal Greenery, Brunswick, Ga.

ACE Facility of the Year (The Tommy Cole award): Jason Cromley, Hidden Creek Landscaping, Columbus, Ohio

Most Improved ACE (The Marty Grunder award): Dan Arnsperger, Blue Ribbon Outdoor, Fayetteville, Ark.

Most Innovative ACE (The Chris Psencik award): Bret and Robyn Schmitz, High Prairie Outdoor, Kansas City, Kan.

Most Profitable ACE (The Jason New award): Cory Moore, Moore Pest Control, Hughes Springs, Texas

Best ACE Team (The Jim Cali award): James Burt, Landscapes East, Syracuse, N.Y.

ACE Community Impact Award (The Michael Bosco award): Matt Davis, College Fund Landscaping, Plano, Texas

Best ACE Communicator (The Vince Torchia award): Jarod Hynson, Earth, Turf, and Wood, Lancaster, Pa.

For a full recap of the ACE Summit, go to **Landscape-Management.net**. @

Two companies join Mariani family

The Mariani Premier Group (MPG) announced a pair of recent acquisitions that expands the MPG portfolio to 24 companies.

In early December, the company acquired Back to Nature Home & Garden, a design/build landscape architecture firm based in New Jersey that has completed projects throughout the greater New York Metro area including parts of New Jersey, Connecticut and Pennsylvania. A few weeks later, MPG announced the acquisition of Florida-based Treasure Coast Irrigation and Rood Landscape, now known collectively as TC/ROOD.

Founded in 1994 by Anthony and Maria Sblendorio and headquartered in Basking Ridge, N.J., Back to Nature Home & Garden has combined experiential client service with a commitment

to ecological and agricultural inspiration. Back to Nature brings over 30 years of expertise to the Mariani family.

TC/ROOD features a large team of dedicated professionals and a reputation for excellence in landscape and irrigation solutions. Their presence complements Mariani’s other Florida-based companies — BLUE, Garden Industries and Botanica — enhancing collaborative opportunities across the region.

Atticus files lawsuit against FMC

Atticus filed a lawsuit against FMC to confirm its expected chlorantraniliprole (CTPR) formulations and product offers do not infringe any valid patent rights owned by FMC. The lawsuit, framed as a declaratory judgment action, aims to allow Atticus to secure legal certainty and to use that certainty

when it begins commercializing its CTPR portfolio.

“Atticus is committed to offering the most comprehensive, unencumbered and cost-competitive portfolio of CTPR products serving the ag and EcoCore markets,” said Randy Canady, CEO, Atticus. “We view CTPR as a valuable agronomic tool that has not reached its full market potential. As the price-to-agronomic value of CTPR becomes more aligned, end-users will be empowered to use CTPR in more routine agronomic rotations for better, more cost-effective insect control.”

While Atticus says it attentively engaged with FMC, it views the declaratory judgment action as the most effective and respectful approach to proactively clear any disputes with FMC while insulating customers from any crossfire and burdens.



Lending a helping hand

Frisella Landscape Group pitched in to provide donations and assistance in North Carolina in the wake of Hurricanes Milton and Helene

BY SCOTT HOLLISTER | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Editor's note: "Time for some good news" is a new feature that will spotlight some of the good deeds, great people and positive stories in the landscape industry. If you have your own good news to share, reach out to either Seth Jones at sjones@northcoastmedia.net or Scott Hollister at shollister@northcoastmedia.net.

Tony Frisella Sr. and the company he founded, St. Louis-based Frisella Landscape Group, are no strangers to philanthropy and giving back to their community.

But Frisella is quick to admit that the company's recent efforts to help victims of Hurricanes Milton and Helene in North Carolina took those efforts to a whole different level. In October, Frisella and other family members traveled to areas impacted by those storms to assist with relief efforts, bringing a truckload of supplies collected at home with them.

"Honestly, I didn't see the folks there getting the kind of help they needed," Frisella says. "I think we were all motivated by the scope of the destruction and knew that we had the ability and resources to help. It's fulfilling to use our skills in a way that makes a meaningful difference for those in need."

The Frisella team collected everything from diapers and paper towels to bottled water and nonperishable food items, amassing enough in just a few days to fill the back of a Ford F350 and a 25-foot trailer. They coordinated their efforts with the Cajun Navy, a group formed in the wake of Hurricane Katrina that now works across the country to assist with rescue and relief efforts following natural disasters.

After dropping their donations at a central location that was operating on a nearly 24-hour basis — "We got there after midnight, and they were still going strong," Frisella says. "Tractor trailer after tractor trailer coming in with donations. It was amazing." — the



Top: The Frisella Landscape Group recently brought supplies to victims of Hurricanes Milton and Helene. Right: Tony Frisella, Sr. (left) with grandsons Theo, Luca and Arlo, and his son, Tony Jr.

Frisella team continued to the community of Castle Rock, N.C., which served as a home base throughout their week on the ground.

Their efforts focused on the hard-hit areas of Black Mountain, Chimney Rock and Lake Lure, where they pitched in to clear downed trees and helped transport supplies between distribution centers, including a major hub at Lake Lure.

The Frisella team also lent a hand to others like themselves who had come to the area to help, most notably a woman near Lake Lure who had begun with the modest goal of providing hot coffee for victims and volunteers alike.


"She was set up in a parking lot of a grocery store there, and the next thing she knew, she was getting donations dropped off. Stuff kept coming, and she was way over her head pretty quickly," Frisella says. "We sort of set up shop there and started helping her organize things.

"It was a chore; where we were staying was about an hour-and-a-half drive there, so we ended up going back and



forth, helping get things set up and organizing the whole operation there. It all goes to good use, of course, but it's easy to get overwhelmed in that situation."

While Frisella says he'd "go back in a heartbeat to help out," he also admits that the experience was a sobering one for him and his team.

"People lost everything; that's what really hit me the hardest," he says. "They were happy for the help, but you could see that they were still in shock. All you could do was hug them, pray with them and give them what they needed to get by for the time being. There were a lot of good people there trying to help, but at the end of the day, sometimes a hug and a prayer were all you could do. You just hope it made a little bit of an impact." 

SOMETHING TO SMILE ABOUT

After a solid 2024 season, readers say they're optimistic about the future and preparing for big things in the new year

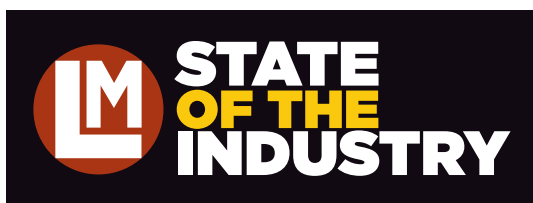
BY SCOTT HOLLISTER | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF AND SETH JONES | LM EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

As landscape contractors and lawn care operators flip their calendars to a new year, most are doing so with smiles on their faces.

That's because whether those folks are looking back at their business' performance in 2024 or looking ahead to what 2025 might have

The team from Top Choice Lawn Care in Austin, Texas, is ready for a big year in 2025.

to offer, there is a sense of overall optimism about where the industry is and where



it's headed, at least according to the results of *Landscape Management's* 2024 State of the Industry Report.

Despite some challenges, more than 60 percent of respondents to the magazine's annual survey said that the landscape and lawn care market in their region moved in the right direction in the year that just

concluded — and nearly 20 percent of those said their local markets were up significantly.

That positivity only increased when they were asked about their outlook for 2025. Over

80 percent of readers said they were either very optimistic or slightly optimistic about what this year promised for their businesses. They cited everything from macro issues like a stable national economy to more micro reasons, such as strong customer retention efforts, for their bullish outlook.

Continued on page 16





While 2024 presented challenges, most landscape companies will carry positive feelings into 2025.



"I DO EXPECT IT TO BE A YEAR OF GATHERING STRENGTH FINANCIALLY, SOLIDIFYING OPERATIONAL EXCELLENCE AND ENJOYING SOME CAMARADERIE WITH THE TEAM."

— NOLAN GORE

Continued from page 15

Only a single respondent to *LM*'s survey indicated they were pessimistic about 2025.

In the coming pages, we'll explore the results of our State of the Industry Report more deeply. We'll also share insights from business owners, suppliers and other observers to learn why most are so optimistic about the industry's overall direction and what challenges they're monitoring that might potentially dampen those good feelings.

TAKING STOCK OF 2024

Most landscape company officials that *LM* spoke with shared the sentiments of survey respondents about 2024, saying the previous 12 months continued trends from the last two post-COVID years of slow, steady growth in both customer bases and overall revenue. And even though a few admitted to some tough sledding during the year, they still found plenty of positives in 2024

in terms of setting up their operations for future success.

Count Nate Moses in that group. The founder and CEO of Precision Landscape Management in Greenville, S.C., Moses characterized 2024 as a net positive for his company, even though Precision missed out on its annual revenue goal.

"Our revenue growth was not quite what we expected it to be," Moses says. "We still managed to make a decent net profit, and I'd say 2024 was a good year for us. But we fell short of our initial annual budget.

"More than anything, though, we really wanted 2024 to be a maturing year for us, a year for us to focus on our processes, focus on our people and mature as an organization. We experi-

enced a lot of growth before the pandemic and then again in 2022 and 2023, so we really wanted to get the company on solid footing and prepare for future years of growth. We had the opportunity to do that (in

2024), so I feel good about where we are starting the new year."

Moses says he heard similar stories about 2024 from his industry colleagues in South Carolina and those he engages with in various peer groups to which he belongs.

"I think some companies might have been a little bit ahead of us, a little more prepared for growth, so I know there were some companies that did big numbers in 2024," he says. "But I think there was a general sense that the economy and inflation would impact business last year. I heard quite a few say that inflation impacted homeowners and clients, so they weren't expecting a whole lot of growth and focused on other aspects of their business."

Nolan Gore, general manager and owner of Top Choice Lawn Care in Austin, Texas — Gore and members of his team are featured on the cover of this issue of *LM* — said that while 2024 presented challenges for his growing business, he'll remember the year fondly.



Nate Moses

“2024 was a hard year for our team,” he says. “We worked like hell. We executed well. In the end, it was still really tough, but I thought we proved that we have some grit and resiliency, and I am hopeful for 2025.”

The manufacturing side of the business had a similar story to tell in 2024. Shane Coates, vice president of dealer sales at JCB North America, an equipment manufacturer specializing in compact equipment in the landscaping space, described last year as a “challenging” one that still yielded positive results for the company, thanks in large part to customers in the landscape industry.

“The landscaping segment was the most favorable industry segment in 2024 and showed remarkable resilience,” Coates says. “That sector maintained steady demand as homeowners and commercial property owners continued to invest in outdoor spaces that enhance functionality and aesthetics.”

A CRYSTAL BALL FOR 2025

For some, the positive vibes surrounding the coming year in the landscape business are just that — hints, feelings or even wishful thinking about what’s to come. For others, such as Stuart Rinehart, founder and president of Aloha Aina Landscaping in Waimanalo, Hawaii, those vibes are more of a complete confidence.

“2025 is going to be a great year. I’m 100-percent certain of it financially,” he says. “My mindset for 2025 is to be one of the best givers and to serve our clients, and specifically my employees, as best as I can. Because of that, I’m 100-percent certain that 2025 is going to be an amazing year.”

Others share Rinehart’s bright outlook for this year. Mark Bradley, founder of LeanScaper based in Toronto, says all signs he sees are pointing up, whether those are economic projections or conversa-

tions with landscape professionals throughout North America.

“I think (2025) is looking great. The results of the election have certainly put some steam in people’s pocketbooks. I’m hearing a lot of good things already,” Bradley says. “The economic forecasts I follow are looking pretty solid from 2025 to 2028. I’m pretty confident that the market is really going to bounce back this year.”

The picture in north-central Indiana is similarly bright, according to Brian Hoffman, CEO of Hoffman’s Nursery and Landscaping in Wabash, Ind. He says that after settling into a “new normal” in 2024 following the COVID years, “we think this year is going to be a good one.”

“I feel like there’s a lot of positive energy. For us, I know that our phones started ringing after the election. In an election year, no matter what way it goes, I feel like people are hesitant about any sort of expenditures. But we’re looking forward to a good 2025, and everything I see out there is positive,” Hoffman says.

Gore’s view from South Texas is similar. “I see the year as a big

one for our organization,” he says. “I do not expect it to be an explosive growth year or monumentally profitable, though I think we will see some good progress there. But I do expect it to be a year of gathering strength financially, solidifying operational excellence and enjoying some camaraderie with the team.”



Lynn Tootle

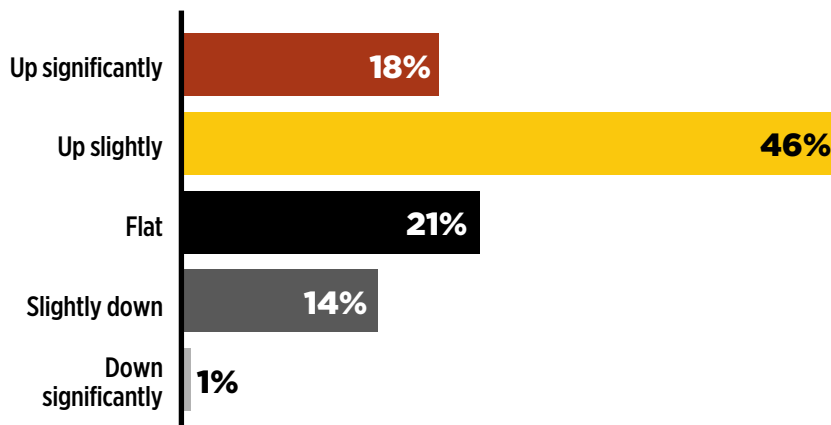
Lynn Tootle, managing partner at Gro-Masters in Garden City, Ga., is as excited about the prospects for the coming year as anyone. But in his case, it’s an excitement born from recent successes

and expansions as much as from broader industry optimism.

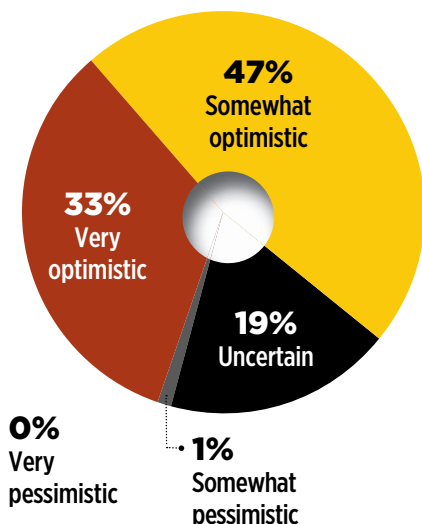
“Since COVID, we’ve been in an unprecedented growth mode,” Tootle says. “Being able to continue to support that growth in our existing markets while focusing on outward expansion is going to be a real focus for us in 2025. We’re going to focus on further establishing ourselves in our new markets (Myrtle Beach is the most recent) while looking at opportunities that might be out there in other markets — just a constant eye on growth.

Continued on page 18

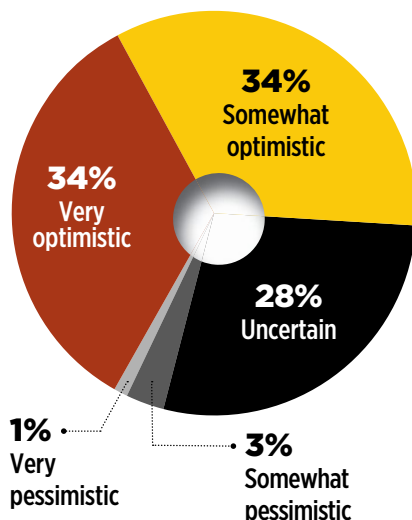
Describe the current state of the landscape and lawn service market in your region.



What's your business outlook for 2025?



What's your view on how the economy will perform in 2025?



The search for good, reliable labor remains a top concern for landscape companies.



Continued from page 17

"Managing growth ... taxes people, and it taxes resources. Each time we've gone into a new location, we've made mistakes. The key is that we learn from those mistakes. So, for us, the big challenge is how do we continue to grow the way we want to without ever sacrificing how we serve our customers and how we take care of our employees?"

Marty Grunder, president and CEO of Grunder Landscaping Co. and The Grow Group in Dayton, Ohio, and a monthly columnist for *LM*, says the air of optimism surrounding this year — whatever its source — is well-founded.

"I'm super excited about the economy," Grunder says.



Marty Grunder

"I don't like making political comments, but I do think Trump is probably a more business-friendly president. I think that's going to give more of the money that's been sitting on the sidelines a chance to be spent. There will be issues — there always are — but I'm very, very bullish on 2025."

HURDLES TO CLEAR

Those *LM* spoke to for this story weren't *all* sunshine and roses, of course. They admit that 2025 is almost certain to present challenges to landscape contractors and lawn care operators that will require attention if those promising predictions about the year are to become a reality.

Continued on page 20



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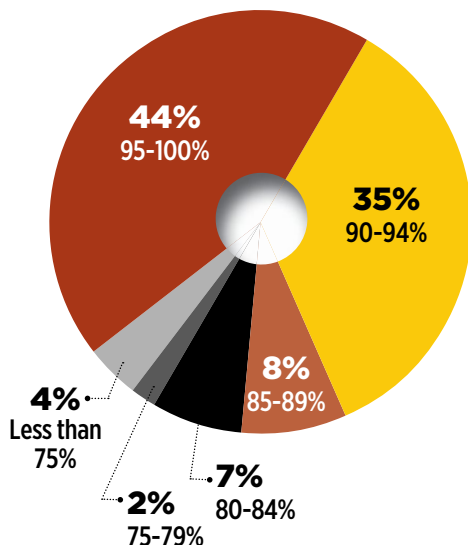
— SHANE COATES, VICE PRESIDENT OF DEALER SALES,
JCB NORTH AMERICA

Continued from page 18

That's why Precision's Moses is taking a cautiously optimistic approach to the next 12 months. “My thought is, ‘Hey, let's expect some growth, but let's also have a plan if we fall short of our goal,’” he says. “But I think it's safe to expect a return to some growth, especially where we're located. There is lots of interest in living in the Southeast, and plenty of people are moving here, so the market for the services that we provide is strong and is going to stay strong.”

Among the potential trials and tribulations that could face the industry in 2025 are rising costs and inflation, regulatory pressures and labor and staffing issues, all commonly cited by respondents to the State

What percentage of your clients did you retain over the past 12 months?

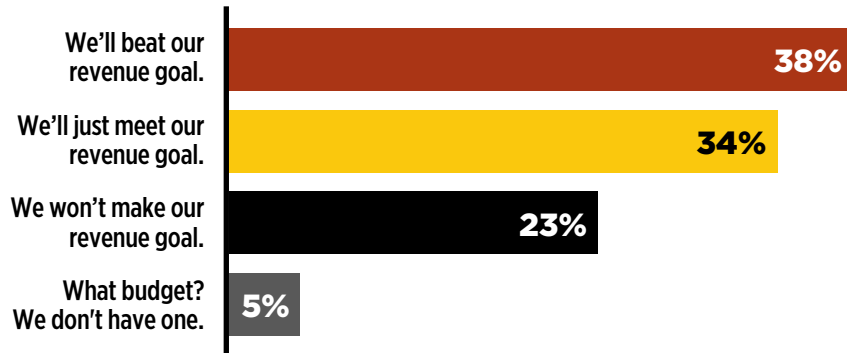


of the Industry survey as hurdles that will need to be cleared this year. Not surprisingly, labor topped that list — 64 percent of respondents indicated they had experienced labor challenges or had difficulty finding reliable workers.

Grunder doesn't sugarcoat the problems that labor shortages could pose. "I think the big problem will continue to be trying to find capable help that we can staff our companies with," Grunder says. "The current American workforce ... it's very tough to find people who want to do this work."

LeanScaper's Bradley agrees, saying the industry's staffing issue is largely one of supply and demand — too much work and not enough people to do it. "I think moving forward, we're going to see a much bigger

How do your expected 2024 revenues compare to your budget for the year?



demand for our services than we've seen in the last 18 months or so," he says. "That's going to result in contractors suffering from a workforce shortage, as opposed to a work shortage."

On the regulatory front, 40 percent of survey respondents said

pressures at either the national or state level were affecting their business and the industry. In New England, those pressures have been most notable when it comes to pesticides, fertilizers and other specialty

Continued on page 22

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Continued from page 21

products, says Edward Coady, CEO of Mainely Grass, which serves customers in both New Hampshire and Maine from its headquarters in Bedford, N.H.

"The state of Maine is quite ambitious in its pesticide regulatory goals, so there's a lot of regulations in the state," Coady says. "But individual towns are restricting pesticides further because they have pre-exemption rights and can do that. It's a concerning trend.

"The piece that's really challenging ... is that the discussions about pesticides are often not collaborative. Some folks either don't want lawns to exist or want them to exist in a very restrictive way, regardless of how much great work has been done to test products or how environmentally aware and friendly we are as applicators.

"I'm certainly bullish about the long-term trends in the industry. But we need to make some progress in finding a more informed consensus going forward, a more thoughtful place."

But if one industry is well-positioned to meet and overcome those challenges, Grunder believes it's landscaping.





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Equipment purchases were high on the to-do list for respondents to the LM State of the Industry survey.

INSIDE THE NUMBERS

Those readers participating in LM's 2024 State of the Industry survey represented every region of the country, with the Northeast (34 percent) and Midwest (27 percent) accounting for half of the total responses.

The companies those respondents worked for came in varying shapes and sizes. A full 60 percent of the companies had less than 20 employees, while on the flip side, nearly 15 percent of respondents were from companies with teams of 100 employees or more. Services offered by those companies included mowing and maintenance (79 percent); weed, disease, insect control and fertilizer applications (65 percent); hardscapes (64 percent); design, build and construction (62 percent); and irrigation (59 percent). Thirty-eight percent described their companies as "full service."

Continued on page 24

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Continued from page 22

In addition to gauging general opinions about 2025, the survey also asked specific questions focused on business management topics, such as purchasing strategies, company expansion plans, regulatory concerns and thoughts on mergers and acquisitions.

Of note from those lines of questions, 78 percent said they planned to add equipment to their fleets in 2025, mainly trucks and trailers (81 percent), handheld equipment (68 percent) and mowers (62 percent).

And an increasing number of those looking to buy in 2025 will be at least exploring battery-powered equipment and autonomous units. Thirty-three percent of respondents said battery-powered equipment would be on their shopping list,

while 21 percent said they would consider robotic options when the time comes.

When it comes to the growing number of mergers and acquisitions in the landscape industry and the role private equity plays in those moves, readers expressed a growing openness to that process. Just more than half said they had been approached about selling their businesses in 2024, and a similar number said they would entertain offers from private equity if they were to come in 2025 and beyond. For more on mergers and acquisitions, see “Forecasting the future of mergers and acquisitions” on page 26.

A STRONG FOUNDATION

Regardless of what the coming year ultimately delivers for those in the



landscaping industry, most of the professionals *LM* spoke to for this story said their overall thoughts about the business that they have chosen would remain unchanged. They’ve found a career they love and look forward to whatever the future might hold.

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"Things are looking strong and getting stronger," says Terry Weaver, general manager of Think Green Lawn Service in Cumming, Ga. "People don't have as much time as they used to have, so things like landscaping and lawn

Sixty-eight percent of State of the Industry respondents say they'll buy handheld equipment in 2025.

care are things they either don't have time to do anymore or just don't want to do anymore. They'd

rather hire someone to do that for them, so as long as that trend continues, I think the business is going to be strong."

Top Choice's Gore put it this way: "I love this industry, and I love the people in it. It's a hard business, but it's good and honorable. More than ever, this is a scrappy industry with grit. The technology shifts and labor troubles will be hard. But people in this industry expect hard and handle it better than most.

"Because of that ... bring it on. I feel great about our future." 🍷

Did rising prices or the rate of inflation affect your business in 2024?



Has your company experienced labor challenges or had difficulty finding reliable workers?



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FORECASTING THE FUTURE OF MERGERS AND ACQUISITIONS

BY SETH JONES | LM EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

San Francisco-based Embarc Advisors is a group of 17 people who work to assist business owners who are looking to sell their companies. In recent years, the company has become more active in the landscape and lawn care industry.

Landscape Management spoke with the company's founder, Jay Jung, who is a former Goldman Sachs investment banker who has completed over \$500 billion in transactions, including the sales of Yahoo!, MuleSoft and SanDisk. As Jung says, "I've sold coal mines, chemical companies, renewable energy, software and internet companies. I've found that M&A is M&A."

LM spoke to Jung about what business owners should do when contacted by a buyer, how he sees the future of mergers and acquisitions in the industry and more. To watch the complete interview, visit **LandscapeManagement.net**.

LM: Why do you think the landscape and lawn care industry has become so attractive to private equity investors?

Jay Jung: If we take a step back, I would say private equity is most active in industrial companies. That's really where the U.S. economy grew, and industrial companies were always viewed as having some hard assets,



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Tito Caceres,
Founder

whether it's a factory or machines, and there's generally some trade secrets or IP that make them unique. So, private equity is very active in manufacturing businesses. More recently, let's say in the last decade-plus, there's been an increasing trend toward service businesses. Historically, service businesses were not as attractive to acquirers because it kind of felt like there's no entry barrier. They think anyone can open up a shop and start doing landscaping. They're undifferentiated. But I think what people are coming to realize is even these businesses, what seemingly might look undifferentiated on the surface, when you dig in, there is differentiation. In the last five to 10 years, we've seen a lot more activity in just regular service businesses, including landscaping, because I

“THE THING ABOUT SELLING YOUR BUSINESS IS THAT IT'S A ONCE-IN-A-LIFETIME EVENT. IT'S LIKE HARVESTING THE FRUITS OF YOUR LABOR, ONLY IT TOOK 10, 20, MAYBE 30 YEARS TO GROW THE FRUIT, AND NOW YOU HAVE ONE SHOT AT HARVESTING IT.”

— JAY JUNG



think buyers realize that as long as a business has reoccurring revenue, there is a system in place that helps the company continue to grow. There's an opportunity.

LM: What do you advise our readers who get a phone call, and on the other end, it's someone asking about their interest in selling their company?

Jung: I think the first thing is to listen, hear them out. It's very exciting. And if someone makes an offer, you almost feel like you have to react on the spot, but you don't. You don't have to rush into it. Listen to them, hear them out and then you have to get the right advice. And I find that a lot of business owners might go to their CPA, they might go to their real estate lawyer, they might go to

Continued on page 28

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Continued from page 27

their cousin or uncle. But I think it's really important to get advice from a real M&A advisor who only does M&A, day in and day out. Because the thing about selling your business is that it's a once-in-a-lifetime event. It's like harvesting the fruits of your labor; only it took 10, 20, maybe 30 years to grow the fruit, and now you have one shot at harvesting it. It's an irrevocable act, and you don't get do-overs here. And I'll say any M&A advisor that's worth half their salt will provide consultations at no cost. So don't be afraid to seek advice and help and talk to a variety of people because you want to find the right person.

LM: What is one bit of advice you give your clients to make sure they get the best deal possible?

Jung: If you look at landscaping, it looks like everyone's doing the same thing. But when you look under the surface, and you tell a story, everyone's been building their business for 10, 20, 30 years — they're doing something right. For small businesses, the failure rate is catastrophic, but if someone survived for 20-plus years, they're doing

something right, and I think it's important to tell the story of what they're doing right and what they're doing well to really let their business shine.

LM: If you look into your crystal ball, how do you see the rate of mergers and acquisitions going forward over the next several years?

Jung: There are multiple databases, but there's one database that a lot of middle-market private equity firms use to source deals. When I go in there and query for landscape management companies, I see about 60,000 businesses... I think the peak years of 2021 to 2023 it was less than 100 deals per year. I think about 10 years ago, say like the 2013 to 2015 time-frame, it was less than 20 deals per year. It was more of a neglected, under-the-radar industry. And I think it's getting more and more attention, and we're getting inbounds from private equity firms saying that they're interested in facility management businesses, including landscaping. I wouldn't be surprised if landscape owners start getting calls from private equity firms saying, 'Hey, do you want to sell?' I think it's going to be an exciting sector going forward. 📺

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"We don't do a lot of ride-on applications, but we do have some ... and the Turfware TR460 was a noticeable step up from what we used before. Also, being in Atlanta, Graham Spray Equipment is just south of us, and they build all of our spray trucks. We're in the transition zone, so we have every type of grass, so our trucks need to be equipped to handle that. It's nice that we have a company in our area that understands all that to work with us on building those spray trucks."



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BUSINESS BOOSTERS

How a changing climate will affect turf in 2025

Lawn care operators share how a shifting climate has changed the way they manage turf

BY ROB DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

As the 2020s reach their midpoint, lawn care operators continue to face new challenges, from newly emergent pests to changing weather patterns that affect not only the types of turf but the pests that target them.

Richard Pearl, director of lawn care at Drew's Lawn and Landscape in Nashville, and Jay Wyrick, agronomist at

FineTurf in Matthews, N.C., share what challenges they faced in 2024 and what that might spell for 2025.

CLIMATE CHANGES

According to Pearl, the most significant issue facing his clients in Tennessee is the shift in climate.

"People who have lived here their whole life have always had cool-season

turf," he says. "So with the climate changes, a lot of warm-season turf has been introduced to our region, like bermudagrass, and many homeowners here do not like that at all."

Data from the National Weather Service (NWS) backs up what Pearl has seen with his own two eyes. Since 2000, the average annual temperature in Nashville has risen steadily from 59.7 degrees to 63.7 degrees in 2024. That includes a jump from an average





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ARMY BRATS

Fall armyworms are a particularly vexing challenge for lawn care operators in the southern U.S.

temperature of 56.7 in 2000 to 63.6 degrees in April 2024.

"We're really challenged with taking care of a lot of fescue while also facing more than 60 to 70 days of 100-degree heat," he says. "Climate has been the biggest factor for the overall health of

the turf. That goes as far as irrigation, too, as it's had a hard time keeping up with the issues we're facing."

For Wyrick, based in the suburbs of Charlotte, it's been a similar story.

"We're running around 20 degrees at night right now (mid-December), which is about six to eight degrees lower than normal, and it looks like we're going to hang in there for the next two or three weeks," says Wyrick.

NWS data again shows an almost five-degree jump in the average yearly temperature in the Charlotte area since 2000. Wyrick adds that the weather has changed the way he plans his year, with the seasons shifting considerably.

"The biggest trend we've seen has been our calendar year shifting almost a month," he says. "We're later into the fall before we cool off, where it used to start in September, but now it's early October, almost November."

"We're about a month later in the spring. We used to see warm-season turf, like bermudagrass, green up 50 to 60 percent by mid-April. But now we're waiting into mid-May into almost the first part of June before the soil becomes consistently warm enough for it to come out."

EMERGING PESTS

Alongside warmer temperatures have come expanded windows for pests to thrive, including fall armyworms.

Fall armyworms aren't unusual for lawn care operators (LCOs) in the southern half of the U.S. But what might be unusual for LCOs over the coming years will be knowing the severity they'll face from year to year.

"I can't say whether there's been any weather pattern change that would make 'em more likely this coming year or anything like that," says Blake Layton, Ph.D., Extension entomology specialist at Mississippi State University. "But to me, they're sporadic pests that you need to be ready for every year."

With climate conditions continuing to become more and more unpredictable, so will pests like fall armyworms, making an LCO's job more complicated.

"(Armyworms) will take out an entire lawn overnight," Pearl says. "So, we're really having to find ways to be proactive (in case of an outbreak), but also out how we can prevent a worm taking out an entire property overnight." 🐛

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NOT SO LUCKY

These weeds may be common, but they're tough to remove

BY NATHAN MADER | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

BROUGHT TO YOU BY



As we jump into 2025, we can all use a little bit of good luck to avoid the pests that plagued us in 2024. However, one weed expected to spring up in lawns again this year is white clover, and sadly, likely not the four-leafed kind.

White clover (*Trifolium repens*), in addition to ground ivy (*Glechoma hederacea*) — another recurring pest found throughout most of the continental U.S. — are two aggressive weeds that love to hog open spaces in lawns and landscapes.

Jay Wyrick, turf and ornamental agronomist for FineTurf in North Carolina, says white clover is a low-growing perennial that spreads through above-ground stems — called stolons — that allow new plants to take root. It grows best in shady, moist areas, and it can be identified by its three oval leaflets that join together in a shamrock shape with a white flower to top it off.

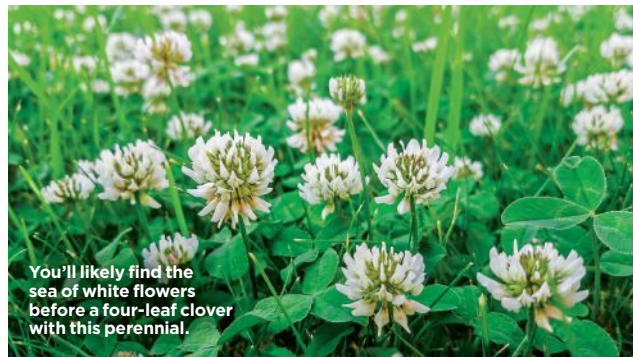
And while ground ivy also spreads similarly through stolons and in damp areas, Wyrick says this perennial can be identified by its long stems, heart-shaped leaves and clumps of lavender flowers.

NEW YEAR, SAME SOLUTIONS

Wyrick says that while these weeds are extremely common, they're still difficult to control. His strategy involves one or two repeat applications in the spring and fall to combat their ability to spread.

"With the stolons, they're real aggressive," Wyrick says. "They do take a couple of applications, typically, to kind of get the best control."

Wyrick says there are several herbicides and solutions to remove white clover and ground ivy, and one mixture that



You'll likely find the sea of white flowers before a four-leaf clover with this perennial.

he uses is triclopyr with 2,4-D. For warm-season grasses, however, Wyrick says other products like MSM and sulfosulfuron can work better (with sulfosulfuron targeting clover more specifically).

"The 2,4-D (and) triclopyr in cool-season (grasses) is absolutely our go-to in cooler weather like early spring and fall," Wyrick says. "Just make sure we get all the right chemicals on the right grass."

Like with many weeds, lush and healthy lawns are better suited to resist these pests, so proper turf maintenance is a great way to prevent and contain them. And, if all else fails, Wyrick says sometimes you might just need to pull them out.

A COMMON MIX-UP

Just like putting the right chemical on the right grass, Wyrick says lawn care operators also need to put the right chemical on the right weed.

Misidentification arises when the plants are younger and the details that make each weed easier to differentiate haven't fully formed yet. For example, he says white clover can often be mistaken for oxalis weeds while ground ivy is confused for purple deadnettle (*Lamium purpureum*) and henbit (*Lamium amplexicaule*).

Waiting for the white flower to bloom in clover is its best giveaway, and for ground ivy, Wyrick says the leaves are more rounded and scalloped with flowers that can be more blue compared to its common mix-ups.

"One of the good indicators on ground ivy is you can kind of get a handful of leaves and crush them up, and it gives this odor that's almost like stale meat or roast beef," Wyrick laughs. "It's not really pleasant." 🍴



The flowers on ground ivy can range from blue to purple, differentiating it from other similar weeds.

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THE BIG ONE

A sacred site


BY ROB DIFRANCO
LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

LOCATION Wilmette, Ill.

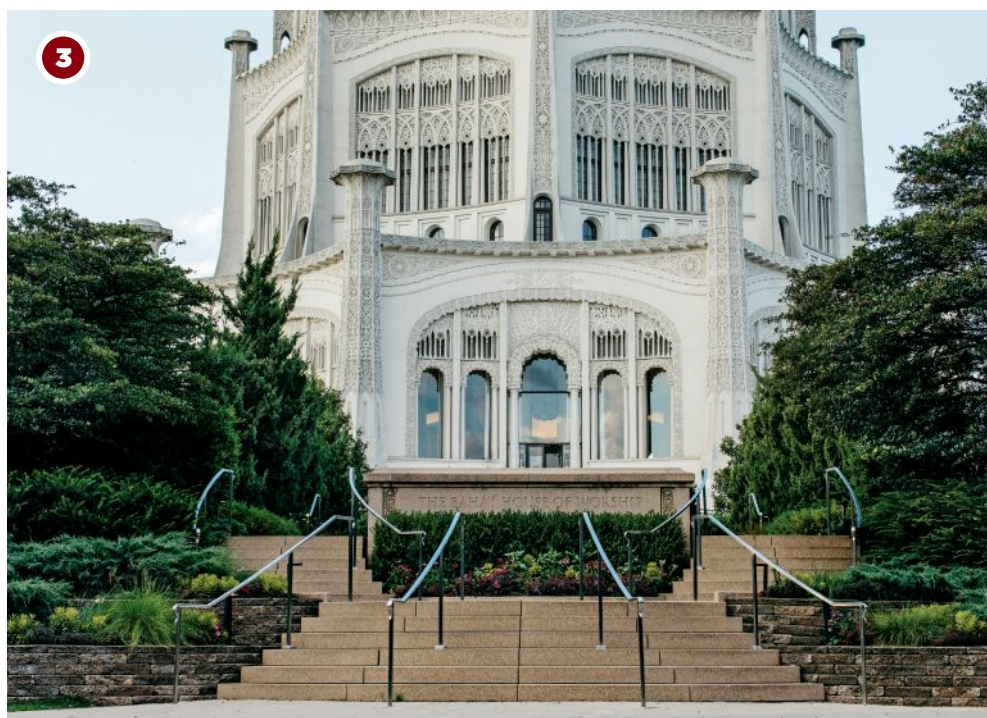
COMPANY Rosborough Partners

DETAILS Located on the shores of Lake Michigan, the Bahá'í House of Worship provided Rosborough Partners with a one-of-a-kind property for maintenance operations. The property consists of nine distinct gardens and paths that lead to the temple in the middle.

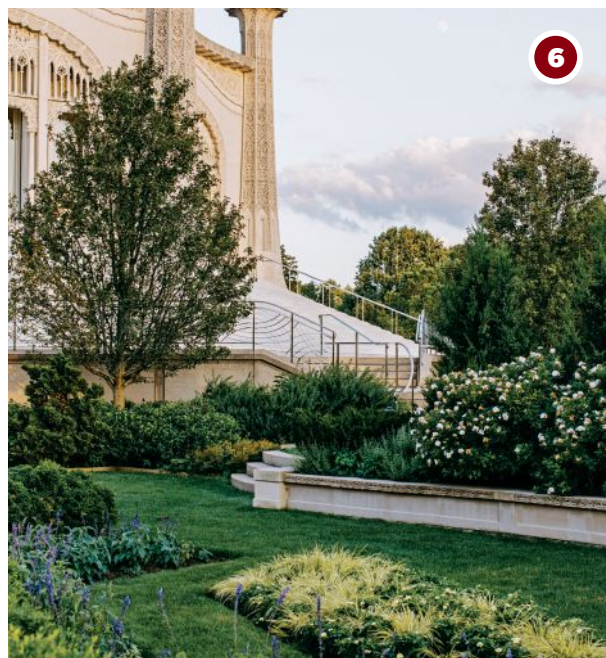
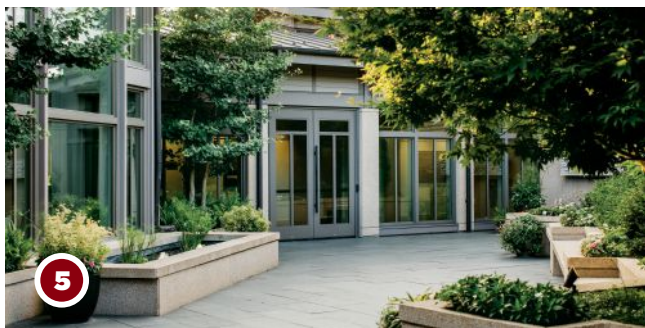
The temple's main entrance features several evergreen trees, which the contractor used as a backdrop for blooming shrubs and perennials. The temple is open year-round, meaning Rosborough partners had to be precise when choosing plantings for the site. Each of the temple's nine gardens is unique, including one that features plantings chosen by the temple's youth and another with plants native to the Midwest. One common theme with each garden is a fountain, which the contractor says was a special request from the client to provide spaces for reflection and prayer.

Rosborough Partners won a silver award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals 2024 Awards of Excellence program for its work on this property. 

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



PHOTOS: ROSEBOROUGH PARTNERS



Captions | **1.** One of seven Bahá'í temples, Rosborough Partners took over maintenance of this property — which sees more than 300,000 visitors a year — in 2017. **2.** The symmetry and diversity of the nine gardens and nine approaches are showcased in this overhead view of the Bahá'í Temple grounds. **3.** A view of the main entrance to the temple, which is the most used of the many entrances to the building. **4.** The temple's third garden is the most colorful, as the temple's youth members selected the plantings. **5.** The welcome center courtyard is meant to be a calm and peaceful area of reflection. The aquatic garden adds the sights and sounds of moving water. **6.** Perennial and shrub plantings in garden No. 7 provide a surprising contrast in color and texture. **7.** These pear trees are the oldest on the property and add dimension to garden No. 7. **8.** The gardens are open from sunrise to sunset year-round. Lighting — installed by Rosborough Partners — allows the gardens to transition from day to night.

BUSINESS BOOSTERS

Mowing under extreme scrutiny

Will labor hours dedicated to mowing drastically reduce in the near future? Experts think so

BY SETH JONES | LM EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

The simple act of cutting grass is the common denominator for so many in the industry. A kid pulling dad's mower out of the garage to make some money is often the entry point into the landscape and lawn care industry.

In recent years, mowing has also become more highly scrutinized than ever for two reasons: a tight labor market and rapid advancements in mowing technologies. A visit to any industry trade show is proof that there have been significant investments in trying to take the laborer off the mower and on to other tasks while the mower does the job on its own.

Chase Tew, production systems and business unit manager for commercial mowing, golf and precision turf technologies, John Deere, says that without a doubt, he believes mowing is the most scrutinized job in the industry because it requires so much labor.

"If you look at a landscape contractor's P&L, roughly 45 percent of their P&L is labor. The overwhelming majority of that is direct labor," he says. "And if you look at where direct labor goes by frequency of task, it is mowing heavy. Seventy percent of a landscape contractor's direct labor cost is associated with mowing. It's a big number."

EMPHASIS ON RESIDENTIAL MOWING

Kress Outdoor Power Equipment is a new entrant into the robotic mowing

market. They made their first appearance at Equip Exposition in 2023 and offer lawn care companies various handheld, battery-powered tools and robotic mowers.

Todd Zimmerman, vice president of product development for Kress, says the company has been working with its dealers over the last eight months to help them understand the benefits of the product line to customers. As a result, he expects the company to make giant leaps soon.

"In just those eight months, we've sold eight times as many robots as we did in all of 2023," he says.

"The part that I start to get excited about is the adoption in golf. That means people are going to see it when they're playing golf, and that creates awareness and buzz about it. But residential mowing is where we need the biggest emphasis right now. It's still in the infancy stage, simply because (business owners) are not sure exactly if they need to trust robotic lawn mowers yet."

GAIN MORE YARDS

Zimmerman says what will help Kress and other robotic mowing companies is the realization that robotic mowers will help these companies grow their businesses.

"If we have a robotic mower at your property, we're going to come by once

a week to do the trimming, blowing and edging that we would normally do," Zimmerman says. "Because they don't have somebody sitting on a mower six to eight hours a day, they can split that crew up and use those crew members to gain more yards, bringing more money back into their business."


John Deere's Tew won't try to predict the future of mowing in the industry, but he does know one thing: It's an exciting time to have his job and be in the mowing business.

"There's a lot of exploration that's going on right now. I don't know that one machine form wins over the other, but it'll be an actual composition of different autonomous machine forms that I think landscape contractors will have the ability to put together in a way that meets their needs," he says.

STAYING AT THE FOREFRONT

Kyle Narsavage, president and owner of GreenSweep and Garden Gate Landscaping in Silver Spring, Md., says mowing accounts for 60 percent of his company's total revenue. He runs 26 crews, with 80 percent of his business being commercial maintenance and 20 percent residential design/build.

Because mowing is so important to his business, Narsavage thinks that very soon, he'll need to convert to fewer ride-ons and more stand-ons, and eventually, he'll need to convert to robotics.

"At Elevate, we talked with Wright about their stand-on robotic mowers in combination with Greenzie," Narsavage says. "That's something that's in our plan for the next, I'd say, three to five years." 



Todd Zimmerman



Kyle Narsavage

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The long haul

BY NATHAN MADER | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

LOCATION Oak Island, N.C.

COMPANY Element Outdoor Living

DETAILS It may seem counterintuitive, but the scenic beaches of a place like Oak Island don't always make for the easiest landscaping jobs.

In fact, the existing house and landscaping at this oceanfront residential property required a complete teardown and redo to meet the client's visionary ideas and combat harsh environmental conditions.

Blair Walton, founder and CEO of Element Outdoor Living (EOL) and the designer for this project, said creating a landscape that could face the issues of a long, thin property against a salt-spraying ocean and sandy soil took a lot of collaboration, creative thinking and hard work.

"The pieces of the puzzle were really a strong collaboration between myself, the architect and the homeowner who has a lot of really cool visions and likes to do stuff a little different and push the limits," Walton says.

Those differences include moving the house closer to the street than neighboring properties to allow for a great view down the rest of the peninsula, filling the property with pathways and tall, weather-resistant vegetation and adding a long, linear pool.

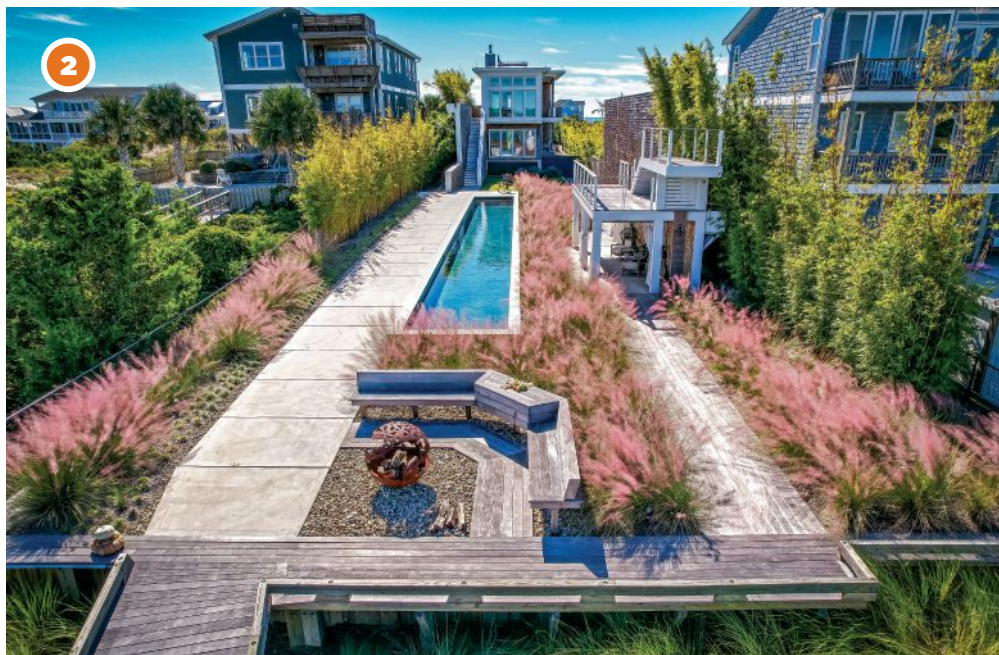
Restoring the dunes — a property located just across the street — was another big goal. The plot, initially reserved for more construction, was not much more than dirt and weeds, but Walton says they added rolling hills, a zoysia meadow and walking trails to perfect the client's vision for a park-like private area.

With all this, EOL won a gold award from the National Association of Landscape Professionals' Awards of Excellence program for this project. 🏆

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



PHOTOS: COURTESY OF ELEMENT OUTDOOR LIVING



Captions | **1.** Walton says the long, thin layout of the property made moving machinery and tools difficult, essentially forcing them to build from the back. The dunes can be seen as the lush green patch across the street. **2.** Few plants would be able to withstand the oceanfront weather and climate, so Walton favored planting large quantities of only a few species. He says the muhly grass is one of his favorites for the pink and purple color it adds. **3.** With the Boat House being built closer to the street, residents have a great view down the peninsula, uninterrupted by the other houses. **4.** Walton says the client wanted the design to provide privacy yet still have a sense of adventure. Clumping bamboo was used because it's tall and doesn't take up too much space when surrounding the winding boardwalks. **5.** Because of flood regulations, EOL couldn't bring in any soil, meaning the 12-foot-high rolling hills were created using what was already on-site, ultimately fulfilling the client's visions of building a "sanctuary for thinking and contemplation with easy access to adventure." **6.** Walton says he and the team are proud of how the project turned out, and he says they were very intentional in overcoming challenges to create something cool. **7.** A photo of the previous house and property shows the desolate, sandy landscape that proved tricky to work with.

BUSINESS BOOSTERS

The total package

Design/build professionals say 2025 will be marked by fulfilling consumer desires for complete outdoor living solutions

BY SCOTT HOLLISTER | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

If you ask a landscape design/build professional to describe 2024, you'll likely hear words such as "stable" and "steady." You'll also hear more than a few references to consumers waiting on major landscaping projects because of general economic worries and concerns over a particularly contentious election year.

But as the calendar turns to 2025, those same professionals are quick to share their optimism about where the design/build space is headed and their beliefs that consumers are ready to more regularly loosen their purse strings for projects that deliver a total package of outdoor living amenities.

"Customers are asking for complete outdoor living solutions, whether that be a pool, fire pit, shade structure, outdoor kitchen or a combination of all of them," says Joe Palimeno, owner and principal designer at Ledden Palimeno, a design/build landscape and custom pool company based in Sewell, N.J.

"Timeless landscape design that continues to fit the architecture of a house year after year is something that we continue to see demand for."

Joe Raboine, vice president of design with Belgard and its parent company, Oldcastle APG, agrees that an uptick in business for both contractors and manufacturers is on the horizon in 2025, with a focus on a total-home concept.

"The consumer will continue to look at outdoor living spaces as an everyday extension of their homes and will look toward ways to add features that promote daily interaction/engagement with their natural surroundings," Raboine says. "Spaces will continue to get larger and will be laden with convenient features like lighting, kitchens, shade structures and more."



Joe Raboine

COMING TOGETHER

Both Raboine and Palimeno say that increased collaboration between all parties involved in the design/build process will be a key component for success in 2025.

"We see a lot of opportunities for construction firms to collaborate with landscape architects and designers," Palimeno says. "Landscape build and construction companies that don't necessarily have an existing arm of their business dedicated to design can increase business by collaboration with design firms and architects. Collaboration within the industry benefits everyone."

Raboine adds, "Firms that approach projects with a comprehensive approach and either offer the full suite of services or work with a network of subcontractors will continue to thrive."

For Ledden Palimeno, that collaboration extends to partnerships with manufacturers offering high-tech solutions

that allow it to take its projects — pool installations and upgrades, particularly — to the next level.


"We've seen continued demand for upgraded swimming pools, incorporating smart home technology into the pools and pool area," Palimeno says. "This includes things like cabanas, landscape lighting and more."

OUT OF SIGHT ...

One of those trusted partners is Coastal Source, a maker of high-end outdoor audio and lighting solutions. Kevin Minton is the company's national sales manager, key accounts, and he says that whether they're working with design/build firms like Ledden Palimeno or directly with consumers, the message they're hearing is that less is more in terms of outdoor lighting and audio options.

"Our goal has been to reduce the form factor with our lighting and bring more creativity and art to the actual light," Minton says, speaking specifically to the company's new EVO line of landscape lighting. "It's all about reducing the footprint and increasing the capability of the light ... which is where the industry is going."

That philosophy also extends to the company's audio offerings, where consumers are seeking high-performance options that naturally blend into the landscape and provide consistent sound throughout their outdoor space.

"2025 will be all about high performance, high quality and blending all that with the outdoor environment," Minton says. 



Kevin Minton

LESS IS MORE

Industry experts say design features that blend into their natural environment will be in demand in 2025.



BUSINESS BOOSTERS

Water we seeing in 2025?

Irrigation trends and tips as we start the new year

BY NATHAN MADER | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

The irrigation industry successfully flowed through 2024, and as we leap into the new year, many experts are looking at what's in store for 2025.

Whether it's optimism for new opportunities, worries about water scarcity or just general business advice, here's what irrigation professionals have to say about the next 12 months.

WATER WORRIES

Water scarcity, droughts and government regulations are becoming more and more prevalent throughout the world, and as the issue progresses, Chris Pine, president of IrriTech Training, says the irrigation and landscape industries are being more heavily scrutinized.

"Water resources are getting stretched. The landscape industry is coming under a microscope," Pine says. "I think ongoing regulations are something that is shaping our industry steadily in more and more areas. There are more areas under some kind of restriction. That is forcing the industry's hand on the practices that we follow."

However, with these new and stricter rules to follow, Pine says it can also lead to new, exciting technology as a solution. For example, smart controllers continue to grow in popularity, and Pine says with how advanced they're becoming thanks to improved soil and weather sensors, they can save an incredible amount of time and money.

But while new ideas continue to sprout in response to irrigation challenges, not every solution can be the best. Dave Shoup, category manager for Hunter Industries, says water shortages and regulations are now leading some people to reduce or eliminate turf in general in favor of synthetic grass, granite or other non-vegetative sources.

"Finding a way to sustain an intelligent green climate, that's the solution," Shoup says. "I think we'll see a trend back to that as we start to realize that paving all of Southern California with plastic grass and decomposed granite is actually exacerbating a heat and drought problem, not a solution."

BUSINESS MANAGEMENT

Another kind of shortage that is expected to stay in 2025 is labor-related. Ray Thengvall, president of The Frog Hollow Green Group in California, says he thinks the irrigation



industry is in a good place, but finding qualified people to work with new technologies is difficult.

"That is our biggest hurdle to get over — finding people that are interested or want to learn how everything works," Thengvall said.

For Pine, he thinks a big business management and training solution is closer than expected. Artificial intelligence is being used more and more as a business tool, and Pine says he's excited to see how it assists with certain tasks in electronic communication, marketing, scheduling and technician training.

"We're just starting to see that. I think in a few years, that will start to become more and more commonplace," Pine says. "There's going to be more models for how that's being used."

2025 will also be the first year under a new presidential administration, and depending on what side of the political spectrum you're on, Pine says to keep an eye on any changes to the cost of materials if the proposed tariffs take effect.

OPTIMISTIC OUTLOOK

Despite the challenges that the irrigation industry has faced in recent years, many experts are still looking at 2025 with high hopes for growth and opportunity.

Richard Restuccia, senior vice president at Husqvarna Group, says with how technology is adapting to irrigation challenges, he's happy to see his company and the industry as a whole progress.

"I think we've got better opportunities and better progress on this than we ever have before," he says.

Pine says the industry has also matured and strengthened enough to not see many drastic changes once the new year begins, meaning if you survived 2024, you're in an industry that can survive 2025. 

FIVE QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW BY SETH JONES | LM EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

Stuart Rinehart

PRESIDENT & FOUNDER
ALOHA 'AINA LANDSCAPING
WAIMANALO, HAWAII

1 Tell me about Aloha 'Aina Landscaping, and how did you get into the business?

We're a landscape contractor out here in Waimanalo, on the island of O'ahu. We do design, construction and maintenance. We also own and operate a couple plant nurseries in the state. We started back in 2005 — humble beginnings. My first job was lawn maintenance for a \$30 account. I remember getting that first \$30, in hand, and I was hooked.

2 Any trends in the industry for where you're located?

Yes, we're fighting a new invasive species, the coconut rhinoceros beetle, and it's decimating all the palm populations out here. When you drive down the street, you'll see it; it's everywhere. It's pretty sad. There are a lot of folks working hard on it. There are a lot of different angles to it, but right now, that's the big elephant in the room — how do we control it?

3 When I met you at the NASCAR party at Elevate, I could tell you were a positive, high-energy guy. Where do you get that from?

I got a lot of it from my mom; she is outgoing and full of energy. Bringing energy is what I am. Anything that you do in life, if you've been rewarded by it, you're like, 'That's working for me.' A great example is meeting you in a random place. 'Hey, let's do an article.' I followed up on it, I created it, it was part of the energy. Like attracts like. There's something inside of you, too. Energy attracts. Whether it's finding your dream girl or being a great father to the kids, or being a solid boss, it just works. The more you're rewarded by the behavior, the more that you seek the behavior.

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

My wife, Katie, is super-supportive and

an amazing mom. We have an 11-year-old daughter who is the most artistic, creative person I've ever met. Madison gets her sarcasm from me — she's a super funny kid. And my 9-year-old is the quintessential athlete. Mason is just good at everything. Every ball he picks up, he's good at it. We love to travel. I think traveling is important because we just focus on each other and really bond in those times whether it's just going inter-island or international, mainland, whatever. We also hit the local beaches and enjoy downtime playing sports and other games.

5 What is life like in Waimanalo?

It's a beautiful country town. We live on some land; our nursery is right down the street. The mountains and the ocean are both right there to enjoy so close. It's an amazing place. My favorite thing is the community. The people here let each other in in traffic, they throw shakas (Hawaiian style waves of Aloha) and everyone just takes care of each other. It's something that's been lost in culture, whether in American culture or even in Hawaii, you just take care of each other, take care of the community ... living aloha and focusing on giving back to each other. 🌺

BEST ADVICE

"Do everything with passion, with high energy — whether it's sweeping the floor or doing invoices. I'm an optimist and I think it attracts ... the energy, the vibe you put out, will give back. So make it the best."



PHOTO: STUART RINEHART

The process pays off for Next to Nature

BY LAUREN DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR

Focusing on a specific division allowed Next to Nature Landscape to expand its maintenance offerings and provide steady growth for the company.

Located in the Kansas City suburb of Olathe, Kan., Next to Nature Landscape ranks No. 127 on the 2024 LM150 list, experiencing a 10-percent increase in revenue from 2022 to 2023. Its customers are about 60 percent residential and 40 percent commercial, and it provides landscape design/build, landscape lighting, irrigation, lawn care and maintenance services.

While owner David Ward says they saw growth across all divisions from 2022 to 2023, their maintenance division especially played an important role in their success.



David Ward

“We made a decision about that time to really grow our maintenance division by adding to our sales team and adding to the services we provide — from plant health care to insect control,” Ward says.

Unlike services like design/build, where each project is unique, maintenance is more about bidding the square footage. The company doesn’t have to reinvent the wheel each time, Ward says, and can better predict future revenue.

“We like the steady understanding of that portion of our division to know where we are year after year,” he says.

Next to Nature’s sales team flooded its existing customer markets with the expanded services and how those services offered a one-stop shop for customers’ outdoor needs, and those efforts paid off, Ward says. The company experienced a 20-percent growth in its maintenance division during that time, and he says it’s still growing.

INTERNAL GROWTH

Ward says a quality sales team helped make that growth possible. Next to Nature currently has about 10 salespeople and is looking for self-starters and people who are passionate about horticulture.

“You could be the best salesperson in the world, but if you don’t love trees, grass and being outdoors, you’re not going to be super successful here,” Ward says.

He says it also looks to promote from within, which helps create a sense of success for everyone. If employees



feel like they aren’t working in the right area, they can move to a different position that’s better suited.

“There’s something we saw in you if we hired you, so we’ll find the right spot,” Ward says.

All of Next to Nature’s teams, from sales and design to production, use Aspire Software, which it started focusing on about three years ago. “It allows us to be on the same page throughout the entire team,” Ward says. “It will help us grow through the next 10 years.”

Next to Nature Landscaping Owner David Ward says hiring passionate self-starters is important to his strategy.

SECRETS TO SUCCESS

Ward advises other landscape professionals looking to succeed to set goals each year that push them out of their comfort zones. Next to Nature creates goals that initially seem out of reach, but Ward says those help drive the company.

“Don’t underestimate yourself and your team,” Ward says. “If you push everybody and create that culture of ‘we can do it if we work together and believe in what we sell,’ the numbers will come.”

As it continues to grow, one thing that makes every aspect of the company operate better is the level of trust that’s been built and the fact that all of its team members want to see the business succeed.

“With more than 150 employees now, I can’t watch and motivate everyone like I did when we just had 20 or 30,” Ward says. “We’ve formed a team we trust who also trust the process. We created a strong culture of trust, and we want everyone to be successful professionally and personally. Without that level of trust, you can’t grow a company.”

Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.



BY BRYAN CHRISTIANSEN

The author is the CEO of Mariani Premier Group, the largest premium residential landscape firm in the U.S. Reach him at BryanC@marianipremiergroup.com.

An outsider's green industry journey

When the editors at *Landscape Management* invited me to write a regular column for the magazine, I was honored and excited for the opportunity. I'm relatively new to the green industry, having joined Mariani Premier Group as CEO nearly three years ago. Yet, I've quickly grown to love this field more than any other I've worked in during my two-decade career leading fast-growing companies. My goal with this column is to share insights from my journey and offer tips to help you grow and succeed.

I have the great pleasure of working alongside green industry visionary Frank Mariani. When I first joined Mariani Premier Group, I was impressed by its 65-year history as both a national leader and a beloved local company in Chicagoland. I was drawn to Frank's vision of building the world's premier outdoor living company. One of our shared goals is to raise professional standards across the landscape industry so we can all thrive.

Before Mariani, I worked in several fast-growing industries. Time and again, I've seen how the principles of building successful companies apply across fields. One of the factors that drew me here was my passion for home-focused industries. Whether it's landscaping or residential solar energy (the market I worked in before joining Mariani), I've always been excited about industries that improve people's lives at home.

I brought to Mariani a focus on building customer-centric companies and scaling businesses while preserving personalized service. Like residential solar, landscaping

“Whether it's landscaping or residential solar energy (the market I worked in before joining Mariani), I've always been excited about industries that improve people's lives at home.”

is fragmented but full of talent. I saw the potential to scale nationally without losing the attention to detail that defines Mariani.

LESSONS FROM THE JOURNEY

My path to landscaping has been unconventional. Early in my career, I helped Fortune 500 companies create growth strategies. Later in my career, after helping turn around, grow and sell a public company with 3,000 employees, I scaled a startup from 23 employees to more than 180 in just seven months. Driving growth at companies — large and small, public and private — is exhilarating and sometimes chaotic, but it taught me the importance of trusting your team, empowering them and providing the resources they need to succeed.

In my late teens and early 20s, I spent two years on a service mission in South America. Working on projects like building homes and clearing soccer fields in Colombia shaped my belief that leadership is about service and collaboration. And as a youth, I often helped on my grandparents' farm in upstate New York. Bailing hay and putting it in the barn taught me there is no substitution for hard work.

At Mariani, these lessons come alive every day. Whether we're integrating a new family-owned business or reimagining outdoor living spaces for a client, our focus is on creating something meaningful and lasting.


This philosophy drives us to build not just a business but a legacy. Are you building a business or a legacy?

LOOKING AHEAD

This column is dedicated to sharing lessons from my career — both triumphs and mistakes. Leadership, vision and decision-making are central to any successful business, and I hope to provide actionable insights to help you tackle challenges and seize opportunities.

Future columns will explore topics such as scaling your business, fostering innovation and building strong teams. In one, for example, I'll share a story about driving through a blizzard to make a key meeting — a reminder of the perseverance and creativity leadership requires. I'll also discuss my decision-making framework, which has guided Mariani's growth.

I plan to spotlight the values that make our industry unique. Landscaping isn't just about creating beautiful spaces; it's about transforming communities and providing meaningful careers. By sharing best practices and fostering collaboration, we can raise the bar and set new standards of excellence.

I invite you to join me on this journey. Let's learn from one another, push the boundaries of what's possible and continue to build a thriving industry that mirrors the care and beauty we bring to our clients' outdoor spaces. 



BY JASON NEW

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

Making the most of your downtime

Q What are the best ways to stay productive and focused during the offseason?

A The offseason presents a unique opportunity for landscape business owners. While the hustle of the busy season might be behind you, this quieter period isn't the time to rest on your laurels. Instead, it's the perfect time to lay the groundwork for future success.

If there's one thing I've learned through my years working with hundreds of landscape businesses, it's that successful leaders don't see downtime as idle time. They view it as a chance to recalibrate, innovate and grow. Here are five actionable steps you can take now to position your business for a stronger, more productive year ahead:

1. Reflect, plan and strategize. Start by carving out time to reflect on the past year. What worked? What didn't? What are your goals for the upcoming season? Successful business owners use the offseason to evaluate their wins and losses and then plan for the future. Creating a roadmap now ensures you're not scrambling to set priorities once business picks up.

Need a place to start? Begin by identifying the one area in your business that, if improved, would have the most significant impact. Whether it's enhancing team communication or refining client acquisition strategies, tackling high-priority areas now will position your business for success when the busy season returns.

2. Streamline your operations.

Use this time to refine the processes and systems that keep your busi-

ness running. Are your workflows efficient? Is your technology up-to-date? For example, if invoicing or job scheduling caused headaches last year, explore software solutions to improve these processes.

In every service, there are ways to improve profitability. The companies that are highly successful take time to discover these opportunities and act on them.

“Start by carving out time to reflect on the past year. What worked? What didn't?”

3. Invest in personal and team development.

Downtime is ideal for sharpening leadership skills. I've seen firsthand how leaders who invest in growth during slower months come back stronger and more engaged. Consider attending workshops, leadership conferences or diving into business development podcasts.

Encourage your team to do the same. Offer training that prepares them for the challenges of the busy season ahead. We love attending GROW!, which is hosted by The Grow Group in February. With its wide variety of breakout sessions, it's a great opportunity to get your team involved in their personal development.

4. Ask for help. Here's an often-overlooked truth about leadership: Asking for help isn't a sign of weakness. It's a sign of strength. Too many owners feel they need all the answers, but even the most successful leaders rely on others for support and guidance.

This is the time to connect with others who can help you grow.


Building connections with others who understand the unique challenges of this industry can provide fresh perspectives and actionable strategies for growth. Whether engaging with a coach or collaborating with peers, these interactions are opportunities to challenge your thinking and refine your leadership.

5. Focus on financial clarity. The quieter months are a perfect time to take a deep dive into your financials. Review your profit-and-loss statements, analyze cash flow and ensure your pricing strategy aligns with profitability goals. This is the ideal time to define the metrics that drive results.

Having accurate financial data helps you make informed, data-driven decisions that can improve profitability and stability. Financial clarity is the foundation of a strong business.

The offseason is what you make of it, so take action today. By focusing on a few key areas of your business, you can turn this quiet time into a powerful springboard for growth.

For a structural approach to leading, consider attending our ACE Discovery Event this March to learn more about taking your business to the next level with the support of like-minded leaders. Being in the room with other successful landscape business owners offers invaluable insights and perspectives that can elevate your leadership and your business. Go to mcfarlinstandford.com/Discovery to learn more.

Do you have a question for a future *Ask McFarlin Stanford* column? Submit it to ask@mcfarlinstanford.com. We're here to help you lead with purpose and grow with passion. 



BY JEFF KORHAN

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

Show up to show out in 2025

“Saturday Night Live” has had great success in producing a live show every week for nearly five decades, a run that stems from a predictable and disciplined creative process. The audience knows not everything will land, but the show goes live at 11:30 p.m. EST every Saturday — without exception.

This commitment to consistency is key. By showing up as scheduled, you produce the best results possible with the resources available at the time. This approach cuts through the noise and gives your company a shot at achieving its goals.

No company or marketing agency has all the answers. Markets evolve rapidly, and the only way to navigate them is to show up. To master marketing, you must consistently put your ideas out there, accept the results and refine your approach based on the feedback you receive.

WHAT SHOWING UP LOOKS LIKE

Showing up can be defined as being conspicuous or clearly visible. However, people show up better than businesses or brands. This growing trend reflects the influence of social media, which thrives on human connection.

Let’s be honest; people are inherently more relatable and engaging than brands. They have stories, personalities and emotions that resonate with others. When those individuals are associated with your company, they can amplify your brand’s impact.

Take Taylor Swift as an example. She’s both a person and a brand, but her phenomenal success lies in how she interacts with her audience. The music itself is only part of the equation.

Her connection with fans distinguishes her brand.

This phenomenon is called a parasocial relationship — a one-sided connection that feels personal, even though it isn’t mutual. You see it every day with podcasters. The intimate nature of the podcasting medium makes audiences feel like they know the host and guests, fostering trust and loyalty.

The lesson is to put people before the brand. It’s unconventional, and that’s precisely why it works so well today. Traditional advertising often interrupts our lives with ads and commercials. Now, permission marketing gives people control. Buyers decide when, where and how to engage with on-demand media or marketing content.

You don’t need to launch a podcast to show up effectively. The main requirement is putting a face to your company — a real person who represents your business. This could be someone from leadership, sales, production or any other department. Their title matters less than their role in serving customers authentically.

Here are a few tips to get started:

- **Highlight real people.** Share stories from your team members, whether they’re on the front lines or behind the scenes.
- **Embrace authenticity.** Through candid videos, photos and testimonials, let customers see the human side of your business.
- **Focus on connection.** Prioritize content that resonates emotionally with your audience rather than



content that only promotes your products or services.

HOLD YOUR MARKETING ACCOUNTABLE

Even “Saturday Night Live” doesn’t rest on its laurels. Producer Lorne Michaels carefully evaluates each show and host, using ratings and subjective metrics to assess performance. You should take the same approach with your marketing.

Marketing will always be a bit messy, but you can build momentum by showing up consistently and gathering insights. Here are three questions to guide your daily efforts:

1. Did we touch someone emotionally?
2. Did we capture and organize a compelling photo?
3. Did we uncover a quote or phrase that could resonate with other buyers?

By asking these questions, you’ll collect the “soft data” needed to improve and iterate.

In 2025, marketing success will depend on your ability to show up consistently and authentically. Lead with people, prioritize connection and hold your efforts accountable. It’s not about being perfect — it’s about being present. 📸



BY TITO CACERES

The author is the managing director at Bloom Talent Solutions in Miami. He can be reached at tito@bloompartnerstalent.com.

Becoming an employer of choice in 2025

As we transition into 2025, the landscape industry faces critical workforce challenges. With 82 percent of companies reporting difficulty finding qualified workers, according to the National Association of Landscape Professionals, and the cost of replacing existing workers ranging from one-half to two times that employee's annual salary, modernizing talent management isn't just ideal — it's essential for survival.

Companies investing in retention strategies report projected growth, while those struggling with turnover face stagnation. Now is the time to establish a Green Talent Guide, a practical framework for creating a workplace where employees choose to stay and grow.

As the founder of Bloom Talent Solutions, a recruiting agency that supports landscape companies nationwide, I've seen how practical strategies transform struggling teams into thriving organizations.

Regardless of role, most employees are looking for three things — prestige, culture and compensation, in that order. Prestige means being part of an organization recognized as a destination employer that attracts top talent and earns respect in the marketplace. Culture provides a supportive environment where weather challenges and seasonal pressures become manageable through team cohesion. While competitive compensation matters, our data show it's rarely why people leave; they depart when they don't see a future.

Here are some tips that can help improve your company's retention efforts:

“In today's market, benefits must address real workforce needs.”

1 Clearing a career pathway. The top frustration driving turnover is unclear advancement opportunities. Workers feeling stuck seek opportunities elsewhere, costing thousands in replacement expenses. Companies using digital skills tracking and mobile-first training platforms report better first-year retention. Despite initial resistance to digital adoption, companies with these systems see a return on investment within six months through reduced turnover alone.

For front-line crews, career paths should outline progression from technical mastery to crew leadership. Skilled technicians need clear paths to management or specialized roles since skilled replacement costs more.


Language barriers also often derail advancement for non-English-speaking employees who make up a significant portion of the workforce, so offering language training and bilingual materials can increase retention in these team members.

2 Foster a positive company culture. Working with the top workplace destinations has shown us that culture becomes the shield against turnover during challenging seasons. Weather impacts, equipment issues and peak-season pressures test team cohesion. Digital platforms have revolutionized how teams handle these challenges. Companies using workforce management apps (Aspire, LMN, etc.) report better satisfaction scores and higher engagement through real-time communication and recognition.

3 Offer strategic benefits. In today's market, benefits must address real workforce needs. Small companies can compete through creative, cost-effective solutions like paid skills development days and guaranteed rain-day pay. Investments in professional development builds loyalty and workforce capability, while rain-day pay provides security during unpredictable weather. Universal perks like safety rewards and certification bonuses help boost retention while improving operational efficiency.

4 Address operational pain points. Companies losing talent often overlook basic operational frustrations. Regular equipment maintenance schedules reduce downtime while boosting morale. When crews highlight efficiency barriers, quick resolution shows their input matters, which creates loyalty while improving productivity.

5 Make the candidate experience matter. Modern hiring practices serve as your gateway to securing top talent in a competitive market. Mobile-friendly application platforms have revolutionized recruitment, capturing more candidates by meeting job seekers anywhere. Structured onboarding programs complement this modern approach, yielding 62 percent higher productivity by ensuring new hires start with clarity and confidence, according to the Society for Human Resource Management.

Another key differentiator involves providing timely, respectful feedback to all interviewed candidates — even those who aren't selected — to build your reputation as an employer of choice. 



BY JEFFREY SCOTT

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

Seven trends to track in 2025

Here are seven long-term industry trends from 2024 to keep front and center as we move into 2025.

1 Sustainability. This decade will present challenges and opportunities. On the one hand, harsher, chaotic weather is creating the need for restorative services, along with better stormwater management, tree services, etc. On the other hand, the more significant trend of battery power will continue to grow. It's not just robotics; electrification will have a far-reaching impact this decade. Make sure your leadership team anticipates these changes.

2 Technological integration. Every year, there are more and better options to automate your business. Your clients and employees want ease of doing business; if you can marry these two sets of needs, you will have stellar results.

Pro tip: Make a two-year onboarding plan for new technologies to keep you non-reactive, but update it quarterly so you stay current. Most companies underutilize their current tech, so task someone with ensuring you maximize utilization.

3 Workforce development. The workforce challenge will not be eliminated with automation or immigration, so it's important you become the employer of choice in your market, as I wrote in my book, "Destination Company."

Reframe your mission. Embrace the mindset that "we are a people-development company with expertise in landscaping." Nurture a training

mindset and methodology to upskill your team. Technology will help, but not without investing in both trainers and other resources.

Pro tip: Don't let pay become a stumbling block. Better employees pay for themselves.

4 Financial management. Ironically, last year's financial winners mastered their marketing and sales funnels. Yes, know your numbers, but don't stop there. Everything in our industry has been in flux — costs, demand, supplies, competition, etc. You have to stay nimble.

Two pro tips: First, revisit pricing, capacity and cost assumptions quarterly. Develop your own executive scoreboard to stay on top of your metrics. And second, have one person review all your purchases throughout the year and negotiate from that annual vantage point.

5 The leadership advantage. The companies with the best leaders win. The key is having people who can grow as your company grows. This requires you to think bigger when making your next hire. Don't be afraid to look outside the industry for great people with a growth mindset. It's these fresh



minds that will change our industry.

Pro tip: Develop an organization chart for a company two to three times your size, and then consider the advanced leaders you would need in key positions at that company.

6 Acquisition mania. Every week you read about another transaction. At Jeffrey Scott Consulting, we have helped owners sell their companies for high value, and we also help companies do the acquiring.

The compelling benefit of acquisitions is that you can grow your enterprise value in multiple ways. When you buy a smaller company for X, for example, it can become worth +/- 2X as part of your larger company, assuming you have a well-run company that can take advantage of the synergies. Also, the realized acquisition cost decreases as you increase the revenue (and contribution) from the new client base and sales funnel.

Pro tip: Only buy from owners (sellers) that align with your values. Otherwise, you may buy a surprise problem you had not counted on.

7 Retire in place. Besides selling, you also have the option to "retire in place," which we have helped more companies do in 2024 than ever before. Look for this trend to continue.

2025 is going to be chaotic and high growth. Be prepared for both. This requires a great infrastructure and a super leadership team working well together, one that won't drop balls when you're ready to pivot.

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BY MARTY GRUNDER

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



What makes a company culture great

My favorite part about hosting our GROW! Annual Conference each year is getting the chance to highlight landscaping companies that are doing amazing things in their market. My team always starts the planning process by identifying companies that would be great tour hosts.

It's how we ended up bringing this event to Des Moines in 2024. I know that choice made some people scratch their heads given our event is always in February, but we felt that the opportunity to tour the amazing RJ Lawn and Landscape was too good to pass up. Company owners Ryan and Annette McCarthy have been working with me and Grow Group vice president Vince Torchia for almost 10 years now, and we've seen firsthand the strides they've made as they've grown.

I'm excited that the RJ Lawn and Landscape team will continue sharing their knowledge with our attendees at GROW! 2025 from Feb. 24-26 in Columbus, Ohio. They'll lead a breakout session titled "Cultivating a Culture: Building a Thriving Landscaping Team."

The culture they've created at RJ is very special. It's a workplace where the team embraces every individual's unique personality and strengths and works together to overcome any challenges. The public can see the impact of this on the RJ website and social media channels as the personality and quirkiness of their brand shine through.

There's also a lot that isn't public. This is a team that shows up for each

“The culture they've created at RJ is very special. It's a workplace where the team embraces every individual's unique personality and strengths and works together to overcome any challenges.”

other, going so far as inviting team members to their wedding. They enjoy spending time together to the point that team members can often be found hanging out at the shop even when they're clocked out for the day.

Our team has worked closely with Ryan and Annette for years, so we know how intentional they've been about creating a company culture precisely like this one; none of it is accidental. Here's what I see them doing to make that happen:

CELEBRATING DIFFERENCES

Their team celebrates and embraces differences among their team. Ryan and Annette talk frequently about how they modify their leadership style depending on the team member they're working with and how they train other managers on their team to do the same. They allow team members to use those differences as strengths.

EMBRACING THE FUN

Their team is fun and quirky and has a ton of personality, and they embrace that in team activities and even in their marketing and brand. You can tell that they have fun working together and have genuine relationships with their coworkers. They are not transactional in their culture

or leadership and aren't worried about "what's in it for me." Last year alone, they hosted baby showers, parties and even a wedding at their facility. That is just who they are, and they embrace it.

STAYING ACCOUNTABLE

It's not all rainbows and butterflies; to create a great workplace, you have to have tough conversations. The RJ team believes in coaching team members to do their best and being H.O.T. (honest, open, transparent) when something isn't working out. At the end of the day, good team members want to work with other good team members.

We learned so much from the RJ team last year, and I'm excited to continue learning from them when we travel to Columbus in February for another great GROW! Conference. This year, we'll tour another great company, Hidden Creek Landscaping. Known for its incredible design-build work, high-touch maintenance and famous in the industry for its incredible facility, Hidden Creek Landscaping will be a fantastic tour and learning opportunity for our attendees. For more information, go to growgroupinc.com/grow-2025. I hope to see you there. 📍

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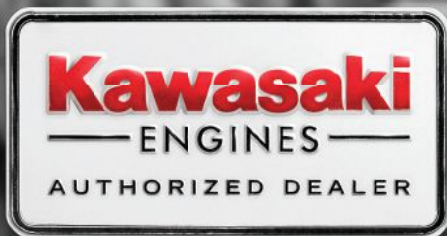
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