



# LANDSCAPE MANAGEMENT

REAL-WORLD SOLUTIONS™



## SHOPPING SPREE

In the market for new equipment in 2025? Our **Equipment Purchasing Guide** is here to help with tips and advice from around the industry





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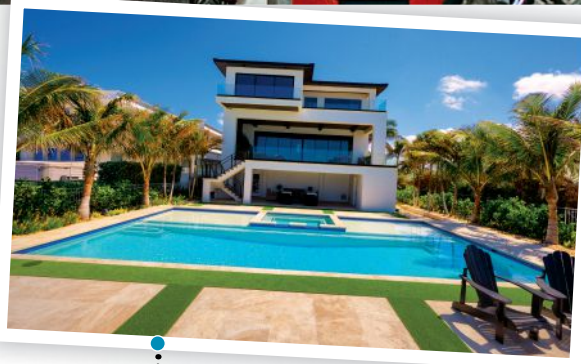
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[ WE'RE STILL OPEN ]

## Apply for the 2025 LM150

There's still time to apply for the 2025 LM150!

We encourage companies with \$10 million or more in revenue to complete the entry form at [bit.ly/42BOWIq](https://bit.ly/42BOWIq) by April 1. The LM150 list highlights the largest landscaping compa-

nies ranked by annual revenue. The list will appear in the June issue of LM

and contact LM Special Projects Editor Marisa Palmieri with questions at [mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net](mailto:mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net) or 440-537-4308.

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## Spring training for landscape pros

**A**s most of you read this, Major League Baseball is gearing up for its 2025 season with spring training activities in Arizona and Florida. At about the same time, landscaping professionals looking to up their game were doing the same thing in advance of the start of their busy season.

Admittedly, the connection between the green industry and our national pastime does require a bit of a leap. But stick with me because I couldn't help but see the similarities between the two during a pair of recent events I attended — Weathermatic's SmartCon 2025 in Phoenix and Marty Grunder's GROW! 2025 event in Columbus, Ohio.

Maybe the resemblances stuck out more to me because, admittedly, I'm a baseball guy. That's rarer now than in the past, with baseball falling behind football and basketball in terms of popularity, and hockey and soccer looming in the rearview mirror.

But I started playing T-ball in kindergarten, played years of Little League baseball and played the game in high school. I even thought about college baseball before realizing I had maxed out my meager athletic ability and shifted my attention to beer-league softball.

I've even been lucky enough to stay close to the game in my adult life, too, after landing a unique gig with MLB doing statistical work for my hometown Kansas City Royals. It's a side hustle that gets me to the ballpark 40-50 times a season and lets me scratch that baseball itch while putting a little extra cash in my pocket.

So yeah, I'm a baseball guy. Maybe the links between what the players were doing in the Cactus and Grapefruit leagues and what the green industry pros were doing at SmartCon and GROW! came a little more naturally to me than someone who could give a rip about the game.

**“Even though I might have been looking at both SmartCon and GROW! through baseball-colored glasses ... I'm sure the landscaping pros came away from both events better prepared to thrive in the year to come thanks to their own version of spring training.”**

It didn't hurt that SmartCon took place in the Valley of the Sun, where 15 teams train during the spring and where I'll spend a week this month for a little spring training of my own to get ready for my MLB job. But just like those players getting sharp ahead of a new season, the more than 300 landscaping pros at SmartCon were getting themselves educated on Weathermatic's SmartLink product line and absorbing words of wisdom from an all-star lineup of industry thought leaders. You can read more about that event in *Need to Know* on **page 12**.

That vibe continued a week later at GROW! in Columbus, even though there was more chatter about Ohio State's recent national championship in college football than the upcoming baseball season. This was my first time attending The Grow Group's big event, and I'll admit I was blown away — more than 1,000 attendees looking for an edge heading into the heart of the 2025 season dove into a full slate of

educational offerings taught by some of the brightest minds in the business and got a behind-the-curtain look at the

operations at Jason Cromley's Hidden Creek Landscaping. You can learn more about GROW! 2025 on our website, **[www.landscapemanagement.net](http://www.landscapemanagement.net)**.

Even though I might have been looking at both SmartCon and GROW! through baseball-colored glasses, I do think the comparison holds. Like their ballplaying counterparts preparing for another season, I'm sure the landscaping pros came away from both events better prepared to thrive in the year to come, thanks to their own version of spring training. Play ball!

And before I go, here's a little sneak preview of next month's issue ... we're welcoming another new member to the *LM* family in April, marking the third new addition to our stable of columnists in 2025. He's someone who's been shaking up the green industry — some might even say he's been “disrupting” things — for some time now, and we couldn't be more excited that he's agreed to join the team. It'll be a debut you'll definitely want to check out. **LM**





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## When purchasing equipment, what is the top feature you look for?

"The top feature I look for is increased efficiency, allowing my company to handle larger volumes of work and ultimately allowing us to complete tasks quicker and potentially with less labor."



### Landscape Professionals

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Lake Bluff, Ill.

**Troy Clogg**  
Troy Clogg Landscape Associates  
Wixom, Mich.

**Pam Dooley**  
Plants Creative Landscapes  
Decatur, Ga.

**Paul Fraynd**  
Sun Valley Landscaping  
Omaha, Neb.

**Mike Giese**  
Perfecturf Lawn Care  
Mt. Pleasant, Wisc.

**Chris Joyce**  
Joyce Landscaping  
Cape Cod, Mass.

**Jerry McKay**  
McKay Landscape Lighting  
Omaha, Neb.

**Max Moreno**  
Everthrive Landscape  
Riverside, Calif.

**Bryan Stolz**  
Winterberry Landscape  
& Garden Center  
Southington, Conn.

**Justin White**  
K&D Landscaping  
Watsonville, Calif.

### Industry Consultants

**Tito Caceres**  
Bloom Talent Solutions  
Coral Gables, Fla.

**Marty Grunder**  
The Grow Group  
Dayton, Ohio

**Phil Harwood**  
Tamarisk Business Advisors  
Grand Rapids, Mich.

**Jeffrey Scott**  
Jeffrey Scott Consulting  
New Orleans, La.

"We prioritize the warranty and the turnaround time for repairs or service. Downtime can be costly in this industry, so having a strong manufacturer-backed warranty and a reliable service network ensures minimal disruption."



"The top thing I look for is support from the manufacturer or dealer and the ability to save on labor hours to offset the equipment purchase. I need to know it will do the job day in and day out without constant issues, and when things go wrong, they are there to help."



"It's pretty simple. What is the return on investment?"



### MORE ONLINE

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



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# STATUS quo. **GO.**



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# LM GALLERY

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

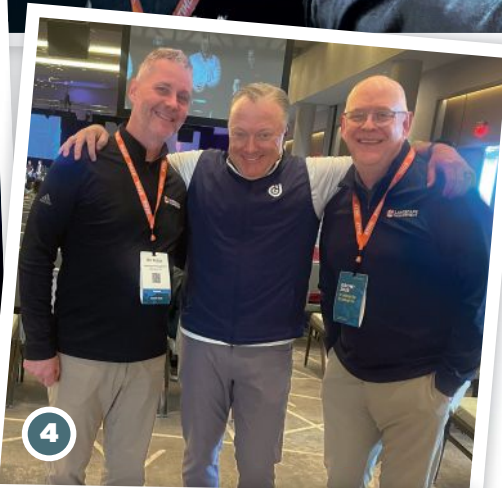
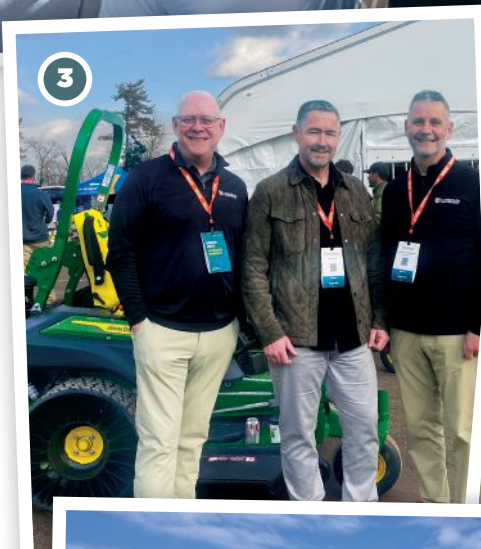
**1 Inside the ropes** During a tour of Hidden Creek Landscaping at GROW! 2025 in Columbus, Ohio, LM's Scott Hollister (left) and Bill Roddy (right) connected with Dara Dolinsky of Team Engine.

**2 Selfie time!** During one of the main stage presentations at GROW! 2025, Hollister and Roddy had the chance to grab a selfie with (from left) James Cali from McFarlin Stanford, Marty Grunder of The Grow Group and Gene Freeman with Complete Landsculpture — which will host the tour during next year's GROW! event in Dallas — along with 1,000 of their closest friends.

**3 Lean and mean** Hollister and Roddy had a chance to catch up with LeanScaper's Mark Bradley during the tour of Hidden Creek Landscaping at GROW! 2025.

**4 Man of the hour** He was a busy man during GROW! 2025, but Marty Grunder took time to snap a photo with Roddy and Hollister prior to one of the main-stage presentations at the event.

**5 Signs of GROW-th** The team at Hidden Creek Landscaping welcomed GROW! 2025 attendees with this custom sign that Roddy and The Grow Group's Vince Torchia (left) used as a backstop for this photo during the tour of the company cofounded by Jason Cromley.







6



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**6 Greene gathering** Roddy with (from left) Chip Soltesz from Dyna-Green, Josh Whitaker from Performance Lawns and John Perry, Greene County Fertilizer founder, president and CEO, at Greene County's Lawncology event in February.

**7 Tour teammates** Roddy got the full industry scoop during the tour of Greene County's facility in Greensboro, Ga., from (from left) Richard Pearl with Veragreen, Deidra Huff with Greene County and Numerator Technologies' Jim Turner.

**8 Triple trouble** LM's associate editor Nathan Mader (center) chatted with Ben Molitor (right) with Best Lawn Care and Jesse Smith with Royal Greens at Lawncology.

**9 Barcade bonding** At Weathermatic's SmartCon 2025 event, Justin White with K&D Landscaping (center) hosted a reception for his new online community, The Disruptors. He's pictured here with Hollister and Colleen Parris from Nasim Landscaping.

**10 Smile!** A selfie taken from the stage at Weathermatic's SmartCon 2025 event in Phoenix.

**11 Pinball wizards** Hollister joined (from left) Rush Feldhacker, Kelly Dowell (second from left) and Weathermatic's Gage Roberts at SmartCon.

**12 Mountain climbers** A group hike with keynote speaker Travis Hearne was on the agenda at SmartCon 2025.



## SmartCon 2025 emphasizes the long game in water management

BY SCOTT HOLLISTER | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

In 2017, Weathermatic found itself at a corporate crossroads.

As president Lex Mason described it, “We had a phenomenal product, the beginnings of a world-class team, and all the desire, grit and ambition in the world, but we were not seeing a lot of growth. Something was missing.”

But as Mason and the team at Weathermatic put their heads down and worked on charting a way forward, they resisted the urge to lean into quick fixes and instead focused on more sustainable solutions.

“We wanted to play the long game,” Mason said. “We decided we were going to intentionally align our business around our clients, our partners and their results. We wanted to take an approach that the more success those in the industry see, the more success we’ll see.”

A key component of that long-range plan was the creation of Weathermatic’s SmartCon partner summit. The 2025 edition of the event took place in Phoenix, Ariz., in February. More than 300 customers and industry partners attended three days of professional development, technical training and presentations from some of the industry’s top thought leaders,

including several regular contributors to *Landscape Management*.

In Mason’s welcoming comments to attendees in Phoenix, he issued a gentle challenge.

“You’re going to have some of the most talented professionals in this industry present to you this week,” he said. “We can’t force you to take action, but don’t leave here without transformation. Don’t leave here without something tangible that you’re going to do to change the way you’re doing business today, to become or to extend your lead as a forward-thinking innovator.”

Main-stage presenters included Greg Herring with The Herring Group, who explored how irrigation divisions can positively impact profitability and growth for landscape companies; Justin White with K&D Landscaping in Watsonville, Calif., who shared how embracing massive action can benefit business owners; and Jeff Harkness from 3PG Advisors, who offered advice on nurturing company culture and building a high-performing organizational chart.

Weathermatic also shared several product enhancements to its SmartLink irrigation control platform and unveiled SmartLink Connect, which allows users to manage non-Weathermatic controllers—including two-wire setups—via the SmartLink cloud-connected platform.

Among the first-time attendees at SmartCon was Aaron Wolfe, president of Wickenburg Landscape in Wickenburg, Ariz. As a relatively new user of Weathermatic’s system, he came to the event to connect and learn about best practices from other users but walked away with much more than just technical know-how.



Greg Herring with The Herring Group and a regular *LM* columnist went inside the numbers on how irrigation can impact a company’s bottom line during SmartCon 2025.

“You meet so many like-minded people at these kinds of events, which is really my biggest takeaway,” Wolfe said. “Not everybody is looking as far ahead as the folks here are, and that’s where I think Weathermatic hit it out of the park. They’re focused on one thing, water management, and how we can do that better and more efficiently well into the future. That really resonated with me.”

Robert Olsen, president of Goldenstate Landscapes in Camarillo, Calif., was making his second visit to SmartCon after his company began working with Weathermatic in 2021. “Staying on the cutting edge of irrigation has been a priority for Goldenstate since day one, and I immediately saw this partnership as a way to keep our team engaged and up to speed,” Olsen says.

“Attending these conferences helps us refine our strategy and align it with how we run our irrigation business. At the core of it all is our commitment to what matters most—water management. Plus, there’s the added benefit of connecting with others in the industry and exchanging ideas.”



Lex Mason shows off the company’s new SmartLink Connect product line during SmartCon 2025 in Phoenix, Ariz.



## Changing of the guard at Ryan Lawn & Tree

**L**arry Ryan, founder and president of Ryan Lawn & Tree, No. 49 on the 2024 *LM150* list, is stepping down from his role after 38 years as the company enters a new chapter in its history.

Derek Osburn and Chuck Monico will join Ryan Lawn & Tree as the new vice president of revenue generation and CEO, respectively. Larry Ryan will continue to serve the company as the executive chairman of the board of directors.

Under Ryan's leadership, Ryan Lawn & Tree grew into one of the nation's top revenue-generating lawn, tree and landscaping companies. As president, Ryan grew the company from his garage to a company with six branches in major cities, more than 500 associates and \$80 million in annual revenue.


"Because of you, working together, we have built a wonderful legacy," Ryan said in a message to employees. "Our

greatness of Ryan is in each of you. Continue to build your great legacy."

"We have a large duty to carry on Larry's legacy. It is a significant shift for Ryan Lawn & Tree, and we

have a responsibility to our employee-owners to carry on that legacy," said Phillip Fisher, the company's chief operating officer who worked with Ryan for 23 years.

Monico brings over three decades of industry experience, strong business acumen and values-based leadership to his new role with Ryan Lawn & Tree. Before this promotion, Monico served as senior director of Ryan Lawn & Tree's Omaha (Neb.) branch, formerly CM's Outdoor Solutions Group. .

In his new role, Osburn will focus on driving alignment and a shared strategic vision. He has held key roles at brands such as Milwaukee Tool and Bushnell. In his new role at Ryan, Osburn will focus on driving alignment and a shared strategic vision between marketing, sales and branch operations. 



Larry Ryan

## NALP AND ALLIED GROUPS SUE DHS OVER NEW H-2 VISA RULES

The National Association of Landscape Professionals, along with several allied organizations, filed a lawsuit on behalf of the H-2 community against the U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services (USCIS) over a new rule governing the H-2A and H-2B guest worker visa programs.

Federation of Employers and Workers of America et al. versus Mayorkas et al. challenges a final rule issued by the Biden administration in December 2024 that went into effect on Jan. 17, 2025. The rule, Modernizing H-2 Program Requirements, Oversight and Worker Protections, allows DHS to blacklist employers for illegal fees paid by H-2 workers — fees that employers may not be aware of or have control over in other countries, according to the NALP.

The rule also grants DHS authority to blacklist employers based on

past violations of federal, state or local labor laws, even if those violations do not involve H-2 program participation.

NALP is joined in the lawsuit by the Federation of Employers and Workers of America, the Outdoor Amusement Business Association, the Seasonal Employment Alliance and the National Council of Agricultural Employers.

According to the NALP, the plaintiffs are seeking to have the rule vacated because, among other things, it violates the Congressional Review Act.

"This rule provides DHS with labor law oversight which Congress never intended, which is redundant and wasteful. More troubling is the liability imposed on employers and employees that are using the H-2B program the right way," said Andrew Bray, senior vice president, government relations and membership for the NALP.

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**Tom Fair**

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# Let the crew choose

At Jensen Gardens, a job well done is rewarded every month by letting the crew choose their charity of choice

BY SETH JONES | LM EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

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

For more than 20 years, Jensen Gardens has serviced the Omaha, Neb. area. The company does landscape design, construction, pool installations and also does commercial landscape, maintenance and snow removal.

With roughly 90 employees, the company describes itself as a "medium-sized company with a big impact." Thinking about that motto, Nick Jensen, vice president, wanted to add a charitable program to the company's other philanthropic efforts that would involve his crews and raise awareness of what good deed they were doing — to create an ownership of the good deed. That's when he came up with the Charity of the Month idea.

The concept is simple: Every month, Jensen Gardens donates \$250 to a charitable cause. The cause is chosen by a vote; the winner is the crew that gets the most votes for working above and beyond their normal role.

"You can't vote for yourself, but you can vote for the other crews who you've observed going out of their way,"

Jensen says. "Usually it's kind of ... 'These guys stayed late and helped us out,' or, 'They had a difficult customer but were still able to get a positive review.' We have a committee that reviews the nominations and then decides on the winner."

The reward is the crew gets to choose which charitable cause they'd like to support with that \$250 donation.



Nick Jensen



The Charity of the Month effort at Jensen Gardens has involved the entire team in the company's giving.

"We could take that crew to lunch, but this is something that resonates with the guys — they don't have the cash to donate to something they're passionate about," Jensen says. "We're not donating a ton of money, but we want the crew to know that they did something good, and the community is going to benefit."

Jensen says the most popular cause has been the Our Lady of Guadalupe church. Jensen Gardens has a large community of Hispanic employees, and the Our Lady of Guadalupe is the church many of their employees go to, but there have been many other organizations that have come up. The Ronald McDonald House, the Nebraska Humane Society and even a GoFundMe campaign have all been selected.

"If I pick it every month, it's going to be the charitable cause that I align

with," Jensen says. "You're mixing charitable work with a competition at work. If we take someone to lunch, that's kind of boring. When they asked me if they could do the GoFundMe, I said, 'It's your money. Donate it however you want to.' The guys like to spread it out; it makes it fun."

Jensen Gardens has been making this charitable donation for the last four years, and they learned something early on: Some of the causes were caught off guard by the check. Now, Jensen is sure to include a note explaining who they are and why they're receiving the money.

"Some of these organizations would get a check from us, and they'd say, 'What is this check for? What do we do with it?'" Jensen says. "I said, 'Gosh, I don't care, we just want to recognize our employees.' And that's made everyone feel like it's a reward not just for the employees, but also for our local community."



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# LET'S MAKE A DEAL

**A newcomer to the green industry learned what works and what doesn't during his first time through the equipment-purchasing process**

BY SCOTT HOLLISTER | LM EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

**A**rian Kambakhsh is no stranger to the world of dealmaking and number crunching. Before becoming the owner of Greenspace Landscaping in Bozeman, Mont., last summer, Kambakhsh's professional pursuits were in the world of finance and the stock market. His day-to-day was filled with plenty of buying and selling, analyzing the markets and deciding which deals were the right ones for his clients.

Considering all that — and the fact that he was less than a year removed from making his biggest purchase of all when he bought Greenspace — you'd think that Kambakhsh's first experience in buying new equipment for his company would be just another day at the office.

Think again ... at least to some extent.

"There was some trepidation, sure," Kambakhsh says. "Studying pricing and going through the negotiating process were things that weren't new to me, obviously, so I felt comfortable with the numbers and all that.

"But because I was new to the industry and working with new people, I wanted to be careful as we went

through the process. I wanted to make sure that I was doing right by the people who work for me and doing right by the company. Because of my background, it wasn't an overly intimidating process, but it was a new one, and I wanted to do it right."

So, what lessons did Kambakhsh learn from his first equipment-buying experience in the landscape business? What went right, what went wrong and what would he share with other industry colleagues who were also going through it all for the first time? In the coming pages, we'll dive into all that, his unique path from the financial sector to the green industry and his biggest takeaways from his recent shopping spree on behalf of Greenspace.

## NEW ADVENTURES

Kambakhsh never had his own lawn-mowing business as a kid or any other real ties to the green industry before he purchased Greenspace. But after his long stint in the world of finance ended — the last four years as a stock trader based in Chicago — and he began to study what would come next, he quickly found a lot



### SNOW DAY

Snow and ice work make up nearly 20 percent of revenues at Greenspace Landscaping in Bozeman, Mont.



to like about the landscape and lawn care business model.

"I was looking for something that was still very entrepreneurial, that would be attractive to a self-starter," he says. "My former boss had left finance, too, and bought a business, and I started looking down the same path. Landscaping ticked a lot of boxes — good industry with a good potential for growth, good recurring revenue, things like that.

"I thought I could bring a fresh perspective to whatever company I purchased. Sometimes, business owners who have been doing the same thing for 20 or 30 years are happy with the status quo and don't want to change anything. I thought that presented an opportunity for someone like me who wanted to make new investments."

At first, Kambakhsh's search wasn't limited to landscaping — any service industry company with a similar model would do — and it was nationwide in scope, although he preferred Bozeman because he had relocated there from Chicago to be closer to his longtime girlfriend.

But as luck would have it, he soon learned about Greenspace — the right business in the right location — and once the purchase was final, he began working to learn all he could about the company and the green industry.

"I did my best to go in with a totally open mind about everything," Kambakhsh says. "I knew I couldn't do as good of a job as the previous owners at being a landscaper, but I did think I could provide value to the company with things ... like business development, sales, efficiency, accounting. Areas that maybe they hadn't focused on before or felt like they had expertise in."

### SOLID FOOTING

In addition to the broader positives of the landscape business that attracted Kambakhsh to the industry, he found plenty of specific plusses in Greenspace Landscaping. This was no struggling business in a less-than-ideal market looking for a chance to start fresh.

Instead, Kambakhsh took over an asset with a 30-plus-year track record in Bozeman, one of America's fastest-growing cities (between 2010 and 2020, Bozeman boasted a growth rate of over 40 percent). Greenspace had a long list of loyal customers, was active in the community and featured a strong, veteran team.

"Greenspace had a very good reputation when I came into the picture," he says. "It had a strong, established base of customers, a really good team, a good employee culture. The company had a history of strong financial performances, so this wasn't a turnaround or anything

**"IT DID BECOME APPARENT PRETTY QUICKLY THAT CHANGES NEEDED TO BE MADE REGARDING EQUIPMENT. IF SOMETHING WENT DOWN AND WE DIDN'T HAVE AN ADEQUATE BACKUP FOR IT, THAT WOULD BE A BIG PROBLEM. THAT STARTED HAPPENING MORE THAN I WAS COMFORTABLE WITH."**

**ARIAN KAMBAKHSH**



like that. There were definitely a lot of positives that made me want to buy it."

Because of that, there was no real urgency for Kambakhsh to make substantive changes to the company and its operations when he took the reins on Aug. 1 of last year. It was also nearing the end of what can be a relatively short landscaping season in Bozeman, so there were even more reasons to take it easy and not rock the boat too much as he adjusted to his new role and a new industry.

"I spent a fair amount of time in the field just observing, which helped. I did the same in our offices, just to get an idea of the existing processes and how they did things," Kambakhsh says. "I also talked to a lot of other landscaping owners from around the country at conferences, which helped a lot."

He saw plenty of early evidence that new equipment purchases — including fleet vehicles — would be on his to-do list sooner rather than later.

"There were several great managers here who were very communicative about that kind of thing ... and it did become apparent pretty quickly that changes needed to be made regarding equipment," Kambakhsh says. "We were in the heart of our summer season then, almost all our equipment was being used, so if something went down and you didn't have an adequate backup for it, that would be a big problem. That started happening more than I was comfortable with."

Since Kambakhsh took control at Greenspace, the company has added four new Ford trucks to its fleet, two new Scag zero-turn riding mowers and bolstered its snow removal operations — which can account for about 20 percent of the company's annual revenue — with two snow plows and a pair of new salt and sand spreaders from Boss. Several small handheld pieces such as chainsaws, blowers and trimmers have also been added.

*Continued on page 18*



**TRUCK TIME**  
Greenspace  
has several  
specialty  
trucks for its  
design/build  
work.



*Continued from page 17*

Fortunately, only the purchase of the new mowers was what Kambakhsh would classify as an “emergency” buy. “Between the time that we came to a purchase agreement (for the company) and the closing date, a couple of mowers went down and seemed irreparable,” he says. “The general manager recommended that we replace those ASAP, and I agreed, so those came on board fairly quickly.”

The remainder of the purchases were made to either replace equipment that was still functioning but nearing the end of its life expectancy (in the case of the trucks) or to improve Greenspace’s equipment bench strength (in the case of the snowplows and spreaders). And in most instances, Kambakhsh followed his employees’ lead when determining what brands and models to purchase.

“The only thing I went against them on was sticking with Ford (for the trucks),” he says. “They all had a pretty bad impression of the Ford trucks we had, but that was mainly because they were older and broke down a lot. I think with a few newer ones with more technological bells and whistles, their opinion is going to change a little bit.”

### CLASS IS IN SESSION

So, what lessons did Kambakhsh take away from his first landscape equipment purchasing experience? He cited three key areas that he said will help inform his decision-making the next time the folks at Greenspace Landscaping are in the market.

### 1 Make it a team effort

Aside from the decision on the brand of truck to purchase, where Kambakhsh exercised some executive authority, he says he found great value in trusting the staff to recommend what needed to be replaced and when, what brands to consider and what features were necessary on any new machines added to the fleet.

And while he acknowledges that strategy is a bit of a no-brainer considering his newcomer status to the company and the industry, he says it’s one that won’t change during future purchases.

“I’m a big proponent of letting the people who use the equipment have a say in what that equipment should be and how it’s taken care of,” Kambakhsh says. “And I brought our shop manager into the process, too, to see what he thought would be best. I really trusted their opinions on what direction we should go.”

### 2 Flexible spending

Kambakhsh admits that how he and Greenspace paid for the new equipment — he paid outright for some of the equipment and financed the purchase of others — taught him his biggest lesson as he went through the purchase process for the first time.

That blend was a function of the unique business situation he found himself in as the new owner of the company.

*Continued on page 20*



**A TEAM EFFORT** The team at Greenspace Landscaping in Bozeman, Mont., played a key role in the company’s most recent equipment purchasing, providing feedback on everything from brands to important features.





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*Continued from page 18*

While Greenspace had been in business for more than three decades before he came into the picture and he acquired all company assets in the purchase, from a strict accounting perspective, the company under Kambakhsh's leadership was considered a brand new one, with no credit history to speak of.

"That makes it hard to get financing from a lot of sources," he says. "I still had a good working line of credit, but it was with a relatively high interest rate. That led us to lean toward purchasing outright where we could because some of the rates were so unappealing."

That was the case with the trucks, so three of the four new ones were purchased outright, as was the snow equipment. Kambakhsh says the interest rate on the mowers was much easier to digest, so those new purchases were financed. And he says that in the future, he'll consider leasing options much more seriously than he did the first time around.

### 3 Morale boosters

Although the new equipment has provided plenty of practical benefits to Greenspace and its employees, Kambakhsh has been pleasantly surprised about a more abstract benefit — the effect that investment has had on company morale and culture, which was already at a high level.

"The impact that has had is hard to quantify, but you definitely see it, and that was something I didn't really



**SHOPPING LIST**

Kambakhsh says that equipment to bolster Greenspace's design/build work is on his wish list.



consider," he said. "I know that in the past, the company lost a few employees because they weren't doing big CapEx (capital expenditures) purchases, so there were instances where trucks were broken down or things like chainsaws weren't working. So, maybe you saved \$300 or \$400 because you didn't buy a new chainsaw, but losing a valuable employee can cost far more than that over the years.

"What I saw was that investing in that new equipment was really viewed by our team as an investment in the people that we have here. I'm glad that's how it was perceived, and it was a good lesson for a new owner like me."

**COMING ATTRACTIONS**

Less than a year into his ownership journey at Greenspace Landscaping, Kambakhsh says he's learned plenty beyond just outfitting his company's fleet. He's looking forward to growing the company, expanding its customer base and adding team members along the way.

And he says that the lessons learned from his first foray into equipment purchasing will play a key role in making sure future years are just as successful as his first.

"We do have things on our shopping list. We want to get another skid-steer, maybe something like a Ditch Witch for irrigation work, a couple of enclosed trailers," he says. "We just want to stay on top of the equipment that we'll need for projects we have coming up. We want to make sure we have the right equipment so we don't fall behind and aren't able to service the clients the way we want to." 📌

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ROBYN SCHMITZ

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# A NEW LOOK AT AN OLD DEBATE

## Experts weigh in on buying new vs. used equipment

BY NATHAN MADER | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

**B**uying new machinery and landscaping equipment is no small task.

Between all the different kinds of loaders, mowers, tractors and more that can go into a fleet (not to mention the attachments, insurance, maintenance, etc.), investing in new equipment can be expensive to say the least.

It's for that reason that choosing the right equipment in the right condition is crucial to best support company growth, and opportunities to save a pretty penny with pre-owned machinery become more enticing. Yet, like any used item passed down to its next owner, there's always going to be concerns on its reliability, making it a riskier choice.

So, as the landscaping industry rides into another busy year, experts weighed in on some of the most important pros and cons to consider when looking at new vs. used equipment purchases and how to maximize the ROI on your investments.

### BEHIND THE PRICE TAG

The biggest and most obvious difference in new vs. used equipment is the upfront cost of the machine, with new options being significantly more expensive. However, if you have the budget, manufacturers have ways to make that big price tag become more manageable.

"New equipment typically requires a larger upfront investment, but manufacturers often provide competitive financing options, longer warranties and special incentives that can make purchasing new more accessible," says Lee Padgett, national product manager at Takeuchi-US.

And if buying new is in the budget, landscape pros will be able to reap the benefits of having a fresh fleet in their arsenal.

"New equipment will usually be more reliable with minimal downtime, allowing contractors to focus on productivity rather than unexpected repairs," Padgett says.



### DIRTY WORK

For tasks that require higher reliability, power and efficiency, buying a new machine will likely keep productivity up and headaches down.

"Telematics, fuel efficiency and hydraulics are state of the art on new machines compared with what you'll find on older, used models. These are features that can improve job efficiency, reduce operating costs and potentially provide long-term value."

However, there's more than just that initial price tag to consider when making an equipment decision. Justin Noland, senior operations product manager at Kubota, says maintenance costs of used equipment can often-times surprise users if the machine isn't reliable.

"You buy a used piece of equipment for \$3,000. The next season, you're spending \$2,000 (on maintenance) that you weren't necessarily anticipating or budgeting for," Noland says. "How does that overall affect your business and what your plan is based on income?"

Plus, without the telematics and technological developments seen on new machines, used equipment can often struggle with lower jobsite and fuel efficiency, leading to higher costs over time. But that's not to say that new equipment doesn't also have its own issues with unexpected costs.

*Continued on page 26*





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*Continued from page 24*

Insurance, financing, taxes and more are all expenses that can sometimes be overlooked amidst the excitement of purchasing a new machine, according to Padgett. If you're not careful, interest rates and longer loans can quickly add up, making the price tag inflate more than initially expected.

"Insurance and financing costs can (sometimes) catch new owners off guard," he says.

And if owners don't have the right infrastructure to store and transport larger, newer machines, that can require further investments from users.

### TURNING 'OLD' INTO 'OLD RELIABLE'

Used equipment will always seem enticing with how much cheaper it is, but it's important to remember that the drop in price is for a reason. Noland says as we enter the mowing and landscaping season this year, having mechanical failures sneak up on you could impact your productivity.

"With that cost savings, you trade the cost with the overall condition of the equipment," Noland says. "You (often) don't even know how somebody took care of that



previously, so there's some kind of unknowns as far as how well the maintenance was kept up."

And if certain parts of an older machine have seen particular wear and tear — such as discharge shoots on lawn mowers — or if the machine is missing newer sensors and controls, safety can sometimes be an issue for operators or bystanders.

That's why Noland recommends doing thorough research and going to a trusted dealer or shop technician for used equipment since they're the ones with the

### FUTURE FIXES

**When buying used equipment, being proactive with potential maintenance issues can save you time and money down the road.**

*Continued on page 28*

PHOTO: TAKEUCHI

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**LOOK THE PART**  
Breaking down on a jobsite can be a poor look for a company, so buying new is a subtle way to boost a professional brand image.

*Continued from page 26*

expertise to conduct important inspections and ensure even used equipment is in proper operating condition.

"If you go off of Facebook Marketplace, and you're looking at something there, then you're relying a lot more on what the person selling the piece of equipment is telling you," he says.

Buying used equipment from a trusted dealer is also important for future maintenance and serviceability. Noland says having some kind of local support network that can aid in providing parts, answering questions or making repairs can mitigate the inherent risks of used equipment, making them more viable.

"If you do ever encounter issues, you have that reliable partner to lean on, to help get your equipment back up and running," Noland says. "That's some of the things that you want to look out for."

This kind of proactivity is exactly what Mike Giese, co-owner of Perfecturf Lawncare in Franksville, Wis., says will help make the best decision while reducing future headaches with used equipment.

"I'd recommend getting detailed inspection reports, highlighting the equipment's age and usage history, offering extended warranty options, emphasizing the importance of preventative maintenance and clearly communicating cost benefits associated with purchasing used equipment compared to new," Giese says. "This allows customers to make informed decisions while mitigating potential issues with proactive maintenance strategies."

New equipment, on the other hand, will always have an advantage thanks to the warranties that come with them, allowing for easier maintenance, machine/part replacements and more security in knowing the tool should have a longer lifespan.

Plus, Noland says some companies can even offer loaner programs such as Kubota's Ever-Go. If a new machine needs to undergo a warranty-covered repair, Kubota will

*Continued on page 30*

PHOTO: TAKEUCHI

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*Continued from page 28*

pick it up and give the user a comparable machine to borrow in the meantime, significantly reducing downtime.

### KNOW YOUR GROWTH GOALS

Regardless of the differences between new and used equipment itself, one of the biggest factors to consider is how these options align with the goals of your company. The size of your operation, how often the machine will get used and how intense your jobs are all play a role in making this decision.

"If you'll be using a machine daily for tough projects, a new model may be a better investment due to its durability and dependability. However, for less frequent use or specialized jobs, a well-maintained used machine could be more cost-effective and completely adequate," says Takeuchi's Padgett.

For Noland, he says reflecting on your long- and short-term goals as a company can help make the right decision

**"IF YOU'LL BE USING A MACHINE DAILY FOR TOUGH PROJECTS, A NEW MODEL MAY BE A BETTER INVESTMENT DUE TO ITS DURABILITY AND DEPENDABILITY. HOWEVER, FOR LESS FREQUENT USE OR SPECIALIZED JOBS, A WELL-MAINTAINED USED MACHINE COULD BE MORE COST-EFFECTIVE AND COMPLETELY ADEQUATE."**

**LEE PADGETT**

and reduce the temptation to impulse buy. Even if a used piece of equipment appears at a great price, it still may be the wrong purchase if it doesn't fit with your future plans for growth.

"Think more strategically, think more long term about what's right for your business and what's right for your overall budget and requirements and really understand what the pros and cons are," Noland says.

And while knowing what your long-term goals are is important, Giese says knowing where your business stands in the present can also help ground yourself in realistic purchasing expectations. For smaller operations, the

decision might be pretty straightforward.

"A landscaping company should lean toward buying used equipment when they are on a tight budget, need equipment for less intensive use or are a new business starting out,"

*Continued on page 32*

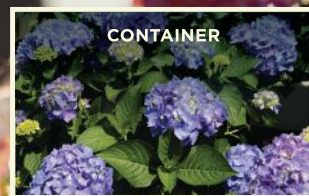
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Continued from page 30

Giese recommends. “Buying new equipment is better when they require high reliability, advanced features, a strong brand image or plan to use the equipment heavily and frequently, especially for large-scale projects.”

As Giese pointed out, an often overlooked feature of new equipment is how it helps boost your brand image. Having a new, high-tech and shiny piece of machinery can make you appear more professional and ready to tackle the job at hand. It’s not a great look if an older machine breaks down while working on-site.

Another factor to consider when thinking long term is how to maximize your return on the investment when choosing a machine, and Padgett says picking a machine that depreciates less in value could be a game-changer down the road.

“While all equipment depreciates, certain brands and models hold their value better than others. Choosing a machine with a strong reputation in the market can mean a higher return when it’s time to upgrade, offsetting some of the initial investment,” Padgett says.



MIKE GIESE

#### HERE TO HELP

The choice between picking new or used equipment isn’t easy, and there are a lot of options, personal goals and what-ifs to consider. For the customer, it can sometimes be overwhelming or confusing.

That’s why on top of doing your own research, Giese says seeking help from dealers and other industry professionals is crucial, especially with ensuring the reliability of used equipment.

“To confidently buy used equipment, thoroughly research the equipment’s history, get a professional inspection from a trusted mechanic, test the equipment yourself, ask for maintenance records and consider buying from a reputable dealer with certified pre-owned options, ensuring you verify the seller’s reputation and check for any potential issues before making a purchase,” Giese recommends.

Regardless of what option you lean toward, Noland says approaching dealers is crucial in these decisions to gather all the facts. He says dealers are happy to help find the missing piece that best fits your business needs.

“Talking to a dealer that sells this equipment day in, day out — that understands the equipment from top to bottom — can give you a lot of good insights as to what truly are the benefits of buying a new piece of equipment,” Noland says. “Then, you have that knowledge and you have that information to make a better, informed decision.”

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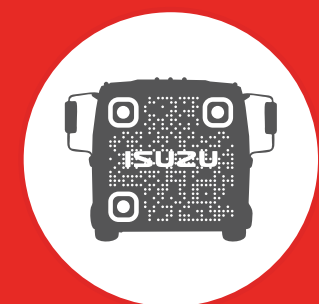
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# THERE'S A FIRST TIME FOR EVERYTHING

**Making your first large equipment purchase? Follow these tips from industry experts.**

BY ROB DIFRANCO | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

**A** new landscape business owner may find it daunting to make a large (whether literally or monetarily) equipment purchase. The options, from mowers to design/build equipment, can seem endless, as can the choice of brands, dealers and features.

To help get your venture into the landscaping business off to a strong start, we spoke with experts from John Deere and Takeuchi to walk through the purchasing process, from identifying the equipment to your financing options.

## KNOW WHAT YOU NEED

With technology continuing to evolve, it might be tempting to splurge on the latest and greatest features. However, Lee Padgett, national product manager for Takeuchi-US, recommends prioritizing certain high-tech features that can help your business grow.

For example, features such as telematics can be valuable for fleet management, reducing downtime and improving job site efficiency.

"While some new business owners may initially think that they can track these things on their own, they need to consider how much time they'll realistically be able to devote to it," Padgett says. "Having this information compiled for you via telematics means you can spend more time out working on a job site and less time in the office — or even worse, the repair shop."

Luke Gribble, go-to-market manager, commercial mowing equipment and compact construction equipment at John Deere, agrees that telematics are a good place to start adding technology to your business.

"(Telematics) give you insights into your fleet that allow you to monitor your business and machines effectively so that



you can ensure that they're doing what you want them to do when you're getting the most out of them as possible," he says.

**WHO YOU KNOW**  
Building a relationship with a local dealer is key to getting the best ROI on a large purchase.

## FINDING YOUR PARTNER

Once you've nailed down the features you're looking for, Gribble and Padgett agree that finding the dealer you want to work with should be the next step. Plenty of variables come into play in the search for the correct dealer or distributor, ranging from their location to the deals they offer.

But the most important, Padgett says, is the capability of the dealership to help you not only during the purchase process, but also after you've bought the machine.

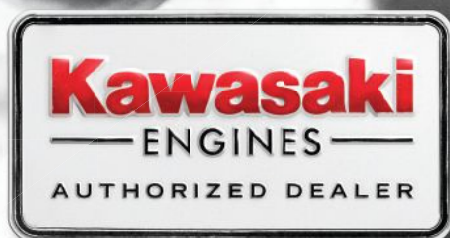
*Continued on page 36*



**LUKE GRIBBLE**



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FIND A DEALER







*Continued from page 34*

“Will they be able to support you through the whole life of that machine, not just when you’re making the first purchase? It’s important to consider and determine when you’re building your business,” he says.

Padgett adds that part of that process entails knowing the brand you’re working with.

“You want to go with a brand with a reputation for high-quality products, a strong dealer network and excellent customer support,” he says. “You also want a brand that’s been around long enough to weather the ups and downs of the equipment industry. These machines are not inexpensive purchases, so you have to

**DREAM TEAM**  
Landscaping can be a rough business on machines, making a dealer partner that can assist with parts and maintenance a priority.

do your homework and determine which one is the best fit for you and your current and future needs.”

Where can you meet these dealers? For starters, Gribble

says visiting local, state or national trade shows is a great way to meet dealers looking to engage with customers.

“You’ll meet some different dealers there who can help you form that relationship, and don’t be afraid to ask them questions. Ask them about their warranty, their parts and service capabilities and ask about maintenance and different programs they have,” he says.

Gribble adds that most manufacturers also have a dealer locator on their websites to further help you find and consider your options.

**NEW DOG,  
NEW TRICKS**  
Experts advise that starting your business with technologically-advanced machines is much easier than retrofitting your fleet in the future.

### FINANCING YOUR PURCHASE

According to Padgett, insurance and financing costs can catch new owners off guard when it comes time to make the final decision and purchase the equipment.

“Many lenders require equipment insurance, which adds to monthly expenses,” he says. “Additionally, financing terms can impact the overall cost of ownership — longer loan terms might offer lower monthly payments but lead to higher interest costs over time. It’s important to factor these financial obligations into the business budget.”

Some manufacturers offer in-house financing options — including Deere — which can help to save a step and some potential headaches during the purchasing process.

No matter the route a business owner takes, Gribble says to learn about all of the potential options a lender offers, similar to when vetting a dealer.

“It can be a zero-percent financing rate or a skip payment solution if you have cash flow issues in the winter-time,” he adds. “(These options) are not just for customers that have been in the business and have a lot of assets; it’s a great way for new customers to get a new machine and give them a leg up in starting their business.” 🐾





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## BUSINESS BOOSTERS

# Beyond price

**Learn valuable communication strategies and discover how strong vendor relationships drive success for lawn care and landscape businesses**

BY MIKE ZAWACKI | CONTRIBUTOR

**V**iewing vendor relationships as solely about price is a fundamental miscalculation. In fact, strong ties with suppliers and distributors are the mortar holding together any thriving lawn care or landscape enterprise. They are the linchpin for delivering exceptional service, achieving optimal cost management and building lasting client relationships.

Landscape pros who maintain a narrow view of supplier and distributor dynamics fail to recognize these partnerships as strategic assets, says Aaron Suttentfield, CEO of RDS Lawn Care Services in Belmont, N.C. He views his chemical rep as an extension of his company's agronomy team.

"We developed a text group between our vendor and our managers to stay in constant communication,"

Suttentfield says. "We had an issue about a week ago with significant damage in a lawn. Our rep was on site with my managers, taking samples, examining conditions and trying to troubleshoot a solution."

While cliché, successful contractor-vendor relationships are win-win scenarios, says Cort Hall, Harrell's territory manager, turf and landscape for South and North Carolina.

*Continued on page 40*



Aaron Suttentfield

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## TURF + ORNAMENTAL

### BUSINESS BOOSTERS

*Continued from page 38*

"I'm trying to help, and money follows help," Hall says. "That's the reality of these relationships. Selling fertilizer is not the name of the game. If I can help (contractors), then that's worth more than turning grass green."



**Cort Hall**

#### UNDERSTAND YOUR MISSION

Landscape contractors must deeply understand their unique business model to build productive relationships with suppliers and distributors. This involves identifying core competencies, revenue streams, profit margins and unresolved challenges. Without these, vendors find it difficult to serve as value-added partners.



**Mary Martinez**

"So, make sure your supply partner is savvy about your market and how your business works, along with the hurdles you face on a regular basis," says Mary Martinez, director of marketing at Horizon Distributors.

#### COMMUNICATE


Proactive communication is the bedrock of a successful contractor-vendor relationship. Beyond simple transactional purchasing, successful contractor-supplier relationships involve open communication about operational challenges.

Similarly, Larry Giroux, Ewing Outdoor Supply's residential-commercial segment manager, says communication failures between contractors and their vendors can create obstacles to achieving optimal efficiency in landscape projects.

"The larger the project, the more pronounced these communication failures become, as the potential for misinterpretation and logistical errors increases exponentially," Giroux says.

#### SEEK ASSISTANCE

Cost-conscious contractors often fail to fully utilize the wealth of strategic tools and resources key supply partners offer in addition to their product offerings.

"It's sort of small ball when you're trying to cut costs and, instead, miss out on the big picture of having a relationship with someone who can really help us," Suttentfield says. "Those value-added services are worth much more than the \$2 savings I might get on a bag of fertilizer." 

Mike Zawacki is a Cleveland-based journalist and frequent *LM* contributor who has covered various aspects of the landscape and horticultural industries for the last 20 years.





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## It's the connections that matter at *LM's* Growth Summit

**Root Development's Kevin Salters lauds the networking opportunities as the best part of attending the annual event**

BY LAUREN H. DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR

**W**orking in landscaping since age 14, Kevin Salters has watched the industry evolve over decades. One change he's seen in the past few years is how social media has made it easier to learn about opportunities where he can connect with other professionals at networking events.

### PEER CONNECTIONS

In December, Salters, owner of Root Development in Suffield, Conn., participated in his first *LM* Growth Summit in Orlando, Fla., at the recommendation of two past attendees. Since the Summit began in 2012, the event has helped lawn care operators connect with each other and industry partners.

"There's no worry of telling secrets because there isn't competition," Salters says. "These are people from across the country there — not

from right in your backyard. We can really talk numbers and not worry about someone possibly poaching some of your information."

Attendees discussed things like what worked for their businesses, how they found new employees for the spring and other issues they all face. The relationships he formed with the other attendees, *LM* partners and *LM* staff were the main benefits of attending the Summit, he says.

"When you own your own business, you don't have a boardroom with a CEO, CFO or all of those people who you can bounce ideas off of," Salters says. "So when you come and meet all of these people at an event such as this one, you have them as a resource to reach out to."

In addition to their conversations during the scheduled meetings, Salters says he also connected with fellow attendees during meals, golf and other get-togethers during the *LM* Growth Summit.

"That's when the real dirt comes out, and you get to ask the really good questions. It's intimate," Salters says. "You literally get to know everyone's name by the time you leave and don't need name tags afterward. You can see what's working in other areas and learn from those people, which is really important."

### INDUSTRY PARTNERS

Salters also had the opportunity to speak one-on-one with *LM* partners

about their products and learn about specials and early order programs. He test-drove equipment and talked to the vendors in detail, and he made purchases while he was there, including a piece from Stinger Equipment.


Industry experts were also available to help attendees understand how to set up their companies to sell in the future. Having that type of resource at the event to discuss the numbers side

of the business — from private equity and venture capitalists to selling to a franchise — was beneficial since it's not something they can typically discuss in a local setting, he says.

"Whenever we go into anything we do in life, you always want an exit," Salters says. "Many of us start

businesses without that plan, so it was nice to talk to them and get that strategy out of this seminar."

Months after the event, Salters still has the agenda on his desk and stays in regular contact with many of the other attendees. Keeping an open line of communication is especially important as the industry grows and advances, he says. The *LM* Growth Summit helped him make connections, and he says he hopes to attend again in the future.

"As long as you go through the application process and you meet the qualifications, you would be crazy not to go," Salters says. "It's the best event I've been to, and I've been in this industry since 1987." 



Kevin Salters

### GET TO THE SUMMIT!

If you're reading this, it means you're interested in learning more about the tools available to help lawn care operators get the job done. Instead of reading about the tools at the *LM* Growth Summit, why not attend and see them for yourself?

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Dowdle is a freelance writer based in Birmingham, Ala.



# BY FAR ONE OF THE BEST EVENTS

“Being in the green space for 42 years, this was by far one of the best events. *Landscape Management* has a great format. The information both from the vendors and the other attendees was top notch. I am currently conversing with many of the individuals who I met there.”

— KEVIN SALTERS, OWNER, ROOT DEVELOPMENT LLC  
(2024 LM GROWTH SUMMIT ATTENDEE)



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# PESKY POA

## Tips for managing this evolving turf pest

BY NATHAN MADER | LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

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In our sister publication, *Golfdom* magazine, we've discussed the ups and downs of *Poa annua* (also known as annual bluegrass), as it can sometimes go past its reputation as an annoying, aggressive weed and find uses on putting greens and fairways.

However, in the landscaping industry, *Poa* is anything but useful, and this grassy weed's ability to adapt to almost any environment makes it one of the most difficult pests to remove for lawn care operators (LCOs).

"It has no place in the home landscape industry," says Jay Wyrick, turf and ornamental agronomist at Fine-Turf in North Carolina.

One of the reasons for its difficult removal is because it's an allotetraploid, meaning it has the genetic material of two different species — its mom and dad plants. Wyrick says this means *Poa* has the programming to act as both a perennial and an annual at the same time.

Wyrick also says this genetic anomaly allows *Poa* to adapt to different environ-

ments depending on whether functioning as a perennial or an annual is more beneficial. And, through a process called transgenerational memory, *Poa* can even "pass down" information to the next generation on environmental growing conditions, such as whether the parent plants were mowed or not.

### POA PROTECTION

Wyrick says the ability to control *Poa* is heavily dependent on the kind of turf you're dealing with, as warm- and cool-season turf have varying amounts of options at the LCO's disposal.

Wyrick says warm-season turf has a more straightforward time dealing with the weed through preemergent solutions like Specticle FLO and Coastal. However, cool-season turf is trickier.

"On the cool-season side of turf, we're limited in what we can do," Wyrick says. "If you want to do a pre-emergent, you typically have to skip fall aeration and seeding due to that fact, using a product like prodiamine or dithiopyr. There are some post products and some pre products that have hit or miss success."

Wyrick also says using plant growth regulators to control seedheads in cool-season turf and bagging the clipping when you mow are other strategies that can alleviate some of the issue.

And because *Poa* germinates in late summer into the fall when soil temperatures drop below 70 degrees F, that's when Wyrick says to start doing an application of your product of choice.

"We (use) the PoaConstrictor in mid-October and then again around the first of December to try to eradicate



### IT AIN'T EASY

Wyrick says *Poa* is in the top five most difficult weeds to remove

those small young plants," Wyrick says. "That way, you don't have that large seed bank building up."

### MORE THAN JUST TURF DAMAGE

Besides being an ugly, invasive pest, *Poa* can cause further damage when it goes dormant. As the weather heats up in the summer, the weed can die off and leave unsightly brown patches in the landscape, potentially waiting to be filled with just another weed.

Outside of the lawn, however, *Poa* can also cause problems between the LCO and their clients, as Wyrick says customers don't always understand how difficult the weed can be to control.

Without perfect control options, Wyrick says it's important to explain your plan to clients and set realistic expectations on what removing *Poa* will look like, even if the process takes multiple seasons.

"We tell people it's a multi-season process of lowering the seedhead count in the soil from year over year," he says. "You're going to deal with it for a couple of months, and then next year, we should be able to get fairly good control on it." 📌

### IDENTIFICATION

*Poa annua* has leaf tips that curve upwards in a boat-like fashion.







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## THE BIG ONE

### Lakeside love

BY ROB DIFRANCO  
LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

**LOCATION** Mequon, Wis.

**COMPANY** David J. Frank Landscape Contracting

**DETAILS** David J. Frank Landscape Contracting provides year-round maintenance for this property, including pruning trees and shrubs plus maintaining perennials, annuals, ground cover and weeding flower beds.

The small boxwood hedges on the property present the biggest challenge for maintenance crews, as they must trim and shape the hedges while allowing them to grow. Crews must also clean up the wild ones while keeping the others together for a manicured look.

The property also has ten large urns featuring boxwoods that need special care in the winter. The homeowner has David J. Frank remove the boxwoods from the urns and plant them in the wood line to overwinter; in spring, they are pulled out and put back into the urns.

The client also had several special requests for a wedding she hosted, including white begonias.

The contractor also provides holiday lighting services for this homeowner during the winter season.

David J. Frank Landscape Contracting 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](https://LandscapeManagement.net/thebigone).



**1.** The sizeable circular bed in the middle of the circular drive with Russian sage, a boxwood hedge and white begonias is visible from the street. **2.** A view of the southside gardens shows off the manicured short boxwood hedges. **3.** As part of a large outdoor wedding the homeowner hosted, David J. Frank installed white begonias throughout the property. **4.** During the winter, David J. Frank provides holiday lighting services for the property, which includes lighting the eight pear trees in front of the home.





## FROM THE SOURCE

**POWER PLAY**  
Propane is making  
a move into the  
landscaping and lawn  
care industries.



# Propane finds its way into the lawn care industry

BY MICHAEL NEWLAND | CONTRIBUTOR



**L**andscaping professionals face constant challenges with fluctuating fuel costs, increasing environmental regulations and the need for reliable equipment to keep operations efficient. As the industry continues shifting toward more sustainable practices, many landscape and lawn care companies recognize that updating their equipment is essential to staying competitive.

As a result, many are turning to propane-powered equipment — and for good reasons. From reducing emissions to lowering fuel costs and improving operational efficiency, propane provides a reliable, clean energy source that aligns with business and environmental goals.

### COST-EFFECTIVE OPERATIONS

Profitability is key for any business, and contractors must make tough decisions to help improve their bottom lines. The cost of traditional fuels like gasoline and diesel can fluctuate, impacting budgets and increasing operational costs. Propane, however, offers a more stable and cost-effective alternative.

Unlike their gasoline-powered counterparts, propane-powered mowers can be refueled quickly on-site using portable cylinders, allowing crews to spend less time at gas stations and more time on the job. Additionally, propane burns cleaner than gasoline, leading to less carbon buildup in engines, reducing maintenance and extending equipment life.

Propane mowers also require a lower upfront investment than electric equipment, which often requires expensive charging infrastructure and has limited run times. The average propane mower

costs between \$8,000 and \$12,000, making propane an accessible choice for businesses seeking value without sacrificing performance.

When fuel efficiency and reduced maintenance costs are factored in, the savings add up quickly over a season of heavy use. Many companies find that their propane-powered mowers pay for themselves within just a few seasons, making the investment even more worthwhile.

### REDUCED EMISSIONS

Environmental regulations are increasing worldwide, putting more pressure on businesses to reduce their carbon footprints. Propane helps landscape companies stay ahead of these regulations by offering a low-emission alternative that still delivers the performance and results they need for demanding jobs.

Compared to gasoline-powered mowers, propane mowers reduce greenhouse gas emissions by up to 17 percent, nitrogen oxides by 19 percent and sulfur oxides by 16 percent. Because propane mowers operate quieter and there are no gasoline spills to worry about, crews can work longer hours in noise-sensitive or environmentally regulated areas.

With more cities and states setting aggressive targets to reduce emissions, propane positions landscape businesses for long-term sustainability and regulatory compliance.

### PRODUCTIVITY GAINS, ENHANCED SAFETY

In the landscaping industry, every minute counts. Propane-powered mowers provide consistent power output throughout the workday, avoiding performance drops that can happen with gasoline engines as

they heat up. Also, propane cylinders can be quickly swapped out in the field, eliminating downtime typically needed for refueling. Unlike mowers with gasoline engines, propane-powered equipment does not experience fuel degradation or carburetor problems, reducing repair-related downtime.

Safety, of course, is a top concern for landscaping companies. The use of propane is often accompanied by well-defined safety guidelines and training, helping crews understand proper handling, storage and emergency procedures.

Plus, businesses operating propane-powered mowers contribute to employee safety and well-being by ensuring better air quality. Fuels that produce fewer pollutants, like propane, can contribute to workers' health and safety by minimizing health risks associated with inhaling harmful fumes. Propane also runs quieter, reducing noise pollution and improving working conditions.

### PLANNING ON PROPANE?

The Propane Education and Research Council (PERC) offers a variety of tools and resources to support landscape professionals considering the switch to propane, including the Mower Cost Calculator (<https://propane.com/for-my-business/landscape-and-turf-management/mower-cost-calculator>). This easy-to-use tool helps businesses estimate potential savings by comparing propane to other fuel options.

To learn more about propane's contributions to energy equity, environmental responsibility and economic savings, visit [www.propane.com](https://www.propane.com). 

Michael Newland is the director of agriculture business development at the Propane Education and Research Council (PERC) based in Richmond, Va.



## HARDSCAPE SOLUTIONS

### Light it up

BY NATHAN MADER  
LM ASSOCIATE EDITOR

**LOCATION** St. Petersburg, Fla.


**COMPANY** Landscapes by Randy Lee

**DETAILS** When building a large house on the beach, it's important to consider how the ongoing project will affect the neighbors. It's also important to consider that, sometimes, those neighbors might actually come from the ocean.

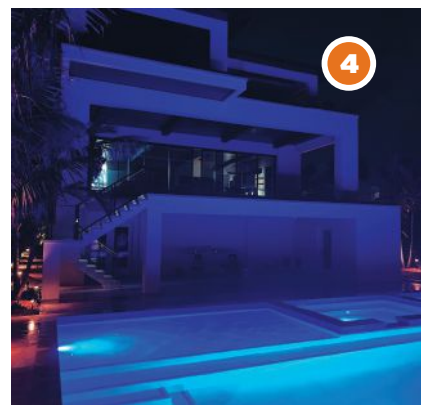
That was a big factor in the “Contemporary Gulf Front Retreat” project's design when the old beach house went down to make room for a rebuild and redesign, and company owner Randy Lee says all the light fixtures needed to be turtle-compliant to not interfere with their reproduction and egg laying.

“If there's a lot of stray (and intense) lighting, the turtles seem to be drawn to it. So, you can only use amber-, orange- and yellow-hued lighting,” Lee says. “I got with my lighting people, and we realized that if we do color-changing lighting, we can flip everything on to the orange, amber, red hues, and we're in compliance.”

But Lee says the property is a lot more than just lighting, and the 3-foot sea wall to block wind and salt spray, the new salt-resistant plantings and a redesigned patio area all add to the award-winning, modern aesthetic.

After more than two years of work, Landscapes by Randy Lee 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](https://www.LandscapeManagement.net/hardscapesolutions).*



**1.** The new landscaping included plantings such as royal and coconut palms, clusia hedges, blue daze and other salt-resistant options. Lee says the tall vegetation helps with privacy. **2.** After turtle season ends, many people need to either keep the amber-colored lighting or manually replace all the bulbs. Lee says he wanted to allow for color-changing LED lights to stay turtle-compliant while allowing an easy switch in the offseason. **3.** Given the tough environmental conditions, the backyard was fitted with custom travertine inserts and artificial turf near the pool to help with durability. **4.** Lee says blue and purple are popular light colors outside of turtle season to complement the pool's aesthetics.

PHOTOS: COURTESY OF  
LANDSCAPES BY RANDY LEE



## » INSTALLATION SOLUTIONS

# The preferred paver

Four experts weigh in on what consumers are most interested in when it comes to creating a beautiful outdoor space

BY SETH JONES | LM EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

**S**pring has finally arrived. The smell of baby back ribs wafting off the smoker on a Saturday afternoon — does it get any better?

Actually ... it could. As far as the baby back ribs rub, well, it depends on the recipe; we're willing to try anything. But for some homeowners, a sticking point is, why is the smoker sinking into muddy ground?

Matt Freedman, president of Beach Landscaping in Myrtle Beach, S.C., says many of his clients are folks traveling south to escape the cold weather up north. They're buying tract homes, and those come with 10-foot-by-10-foot concrete pads — not nearly enough room for a comfortable outdoor cooking scenario (Editor's note: see our Five Questions with Freedman on page 51).

"A 10-by-10 concrete pad isn't enough to fit a table, four chairs and a grill," Freedman says. "The requests we're getting is adding on to an existing patio and creating a greater area for them to grill and enjoy the day and the weather."

Freedman says his clients are most interested in darker colors — browns and grays — when it comes to paver selections. They're also interested in larger pavers versus the smaller formats.

*Landscape Management* spoke with three additional paver experts to learn what the market looks like around the country.

### BIGGER, BUT NOT SMOOTHER

Jason Chilson works for Wisconsin-based Kafka Granite; he's a regional sales representative for the company. He's been with Kafka for eight years, first selling locally in Wisconsin, and now he covers all of the Midwest.

Chilson says in his region, earth tones are picking up steam, but starlight black and imperial gray are still the strongest sellers. He is confident the market is strong going into 2025 and is especially bullish on the company's granite products.

"The first thing I always think about is the durability of the granite material versus some other stone products on

the market," Chilson says. "(Granite) has a better surface ... it's not as porous. It's very low absorption, very high compressive strength. The other thing is the look of the material is much different. It has a higher level of finish."

Joe Raboine, vice president of design at Oldcastle APG, the parent company of Belgard, was at the International Builders' show in Las Vegas with 81,000 colleagues when *Landscape Management* caught up with him. He's been with Oldcastle for 12 years and was a vendor for five years before that.

Raboine agrees that warmer tones are becoming more popular but adds that gray still accounts for 70 percent of Belgard's sales. The biggest trend in pavers, in his opinion, is the use of a larger format of paver.


"The consumer wants a cleaner look — but that doesn't necessarily translate to smooth pavers," he says. "People are very interested in texture. Basalt, for instance, has kind of a flame-finished model. Texture is very popular."

### SUSTAINABLE SOLUTIONS

Connor Ouwinga is the national sales manager for Porous Pavé, a recyclable permeable pavement. The product has been available to the market for 18 years now. Ouwinga says a trend he's seeing is the customer's desire to be environmentally friendly. Porous Pavé's material is made from recycled tires, something that resonates with its clients.

"Over almost 20 years, we've recycled over 25 million pounds of tires," Ouwinga says. "That's pretty incredible, keeping that material out of the landfill and using it for a variety of different applications."

Ouwinga says he wants contractors to think of Porous Pavé as a unique alternative to a traditional paver. That's because the product is paved in place and, therefore, more cost-effective than a standard brick paver, he says.

"It's easier for contractors to work with," he says. "It's also quicker and more cost-effective. It's flexible. I live in Michigan; freeze/thaw is always a concern for pavers and different types of pavements being jacked up during the freeze/thaw. Our product isn't affected by that; it's very permeable." 



**↑ HEAVEN AND EARTH**  
Consumers are favoring earth tones when selecting pavers for their outdoor projects.



## » BUSINESS BOOSTERS

# Major fix

**A Scottsdale residential community faced soaring water bills despite turf reductions. Learn how their irrigation tech convinced them to begin investing in system upgrades. BY MIKE ZAWACKI | CONTRIBUTOR**

**W**ater, water everywhere ... and somewhere, there was a leak.

Despite significant investment in turf reduction measures, the Scottsdale, Ariz., town-home community of Heritage Village IV continued to experience exorbitant water bills and rivers of misdirected water.

In March 2024, the community's homeowners association (HOA) called in Phoenix-based irrigation contractor Ralph M. Holt, CLIA, CLWM, to investigate. Upon his initial audit of the nearly 50-year-old system, he suspected much deeper problems, such as undetected leaks, inefficient and outdated components and excessive water distribution within non-landscaping areas.

"Every time they ran the irrigation system, they had enough water running down the street that you could float a small child," says Holt, the president of Eco Verde Irrigation. "I'd never seen that much water run down a street."

Holt knew the irrigation system would require a comprehensive update and upgrade, including advanced smart controllers, check valves and pressure-regulating sprinkler heads. However, he anticipated that the cost of such an aggressive overhaul would be an obstacle for the HOA's budget-conscious board members.

In his pitch, Holt approached HOA members from several strategic angles. First, he emphasized the intrinsic value of Heritage Village IV's established landscaping. Eliminating these areas could generate significant resident resentment, especially since these reductions have proven unsuccessful in saving water.

"Heritage's HOA had already done turf conversions, but they didn't see their water bill go down because the system was highly inefficient," Holt says. "No amount of reductions was going to change that fact."

Holt then proposed the HOA consider system upgrades as a proactive measure to comply with inevitable future water restrictions. While the local water authority did not have a strict water-use mandate at that time, that could change at a moment's notice.

Finally, Holt appealed to the HOA that system upgrades would foster healthier landscapes with less water. Hydraulic issues within an irrigation system create pressure mismanagement and gross water inefficiencies.

"In a large community, you don't know what your hydraulics are doing," he says. "When you have a flow sensor, you know when you have a broken pipe, a broken sprinkler head or a valve stuck on or not open."

Heritage Village's HOA initially elected to implement a smart controller with flow sensing. This decision was strategically driven by the city of Scottsdale's flow-sensing rebate program. It offered a compelling financial incentive, positioning it as the most advantageous initial investment for the community's water management overhaul.

In addition, they retrofitted two turf zones with high-efficiency rotary nozzles, incorporating pressure-regulating stems (PRS) and check valves

**“Always educating the customer is important so they understand the ‘why’ about what you’re doing and understanding the results.”**

—RALPH HOLT



to provide residents with a compelling visual demonstration of modern water conservation. The goal was to directly compare the dramatic reduction in runoff from the optimized zones versus the significant water waste observed from the remaining, less-efficient sections.

Going forward, Holt is working with Heritage Village's HOA on a comprehensive sprinkler head overhaul to reduce the number of heads in the system from 7,000 to 4,000. By demonstrating the tangible benefits of adopting pressure-regulating heads and strategically transitioning certain areas to rotary nozzles, Holt says the community can minimize water waste and realize long-term cost savings by reducing future maintenance issues and replacement expenses.

"Always educating the customer is important so they understand the 'why' about what you're doing and understanding the results," Holt says. "We've made some progress, and now these are the ways we can make even more progress." 📍

Mike Zawacki is a Cleveland-based journalist and frequent LM contributor who has covered various aspects of the landscape and horticultural industries for the last 20 years.



# FIVE QUESTIONS

INTERVIEW BY SETH JONES | LM EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

## Matt Freedman

**BEACH LANDSCAPING**

MYRTLE BEACH, S.C.

### 1 How did Beach Landscaping get its start?

We're a family business. My father and I started it in 2000, and my brother joined us in 2020. Originally, my dad and I were in the commercial cleaning business, cleaning restaurants. Then we met somebody who had a small landscaping business, cutting lawns. We saw an opportunity to grow that business by getting some of our restaurant cleaning accounts as landscaping accounts.

### 2 What are your hopes and expectations for the business over the next few years?

We're looking to continue to grow. We've tripled in size over the last five years. We're looking to not necessarily continue that (level of) growth, but to continue slowly growing and at the same time become more profitable. We're fine-tuning everything so that we're minimizing our costs as much as possible and still able to keep the quality of work.

### 3 What does your family do for fun?

My kids are 27 and 22 — they're grown. We don't live too far from the beach. My wife and I, we spend most of our free time walking around the town we live in and on the beach. There's an area in Murrells Inlet called the MarshWalk. They have a bunch of restaurants, and there's always live music.

There's always great food and drinks, and it's a good atmosphere, good vibes.

### 4 Which sports teams do you root for, and do you have a favorite sports moment?

I went to the University of Florida. So of course, football and basketball with the Gators, and then I'm a big Red Sox fan for baseball and Washington Commanders for football. I follow more basketball and football than anything. My favorite moment was the 2004 World Series. I got to watch that with my dad. He was a long-suffering Red Sox fan his whole life up until that point. It was cool to get to share that with him.

### 5 What's the best thing about having your job?

Two things: One, it's fun to hear the positive feedback we get from customers. It feels good that we're able to go in and make people happy with the job we do. And then two, I really enjoy being able to provide a good, stable work environment to the employees. We give them something to work toward for their future. 🙌

#### BEST ADVICE

**"To anyone who's starting out in business, be responsive to customers. If they call you, call them right back. Also, get involved in some kind of networking group."**

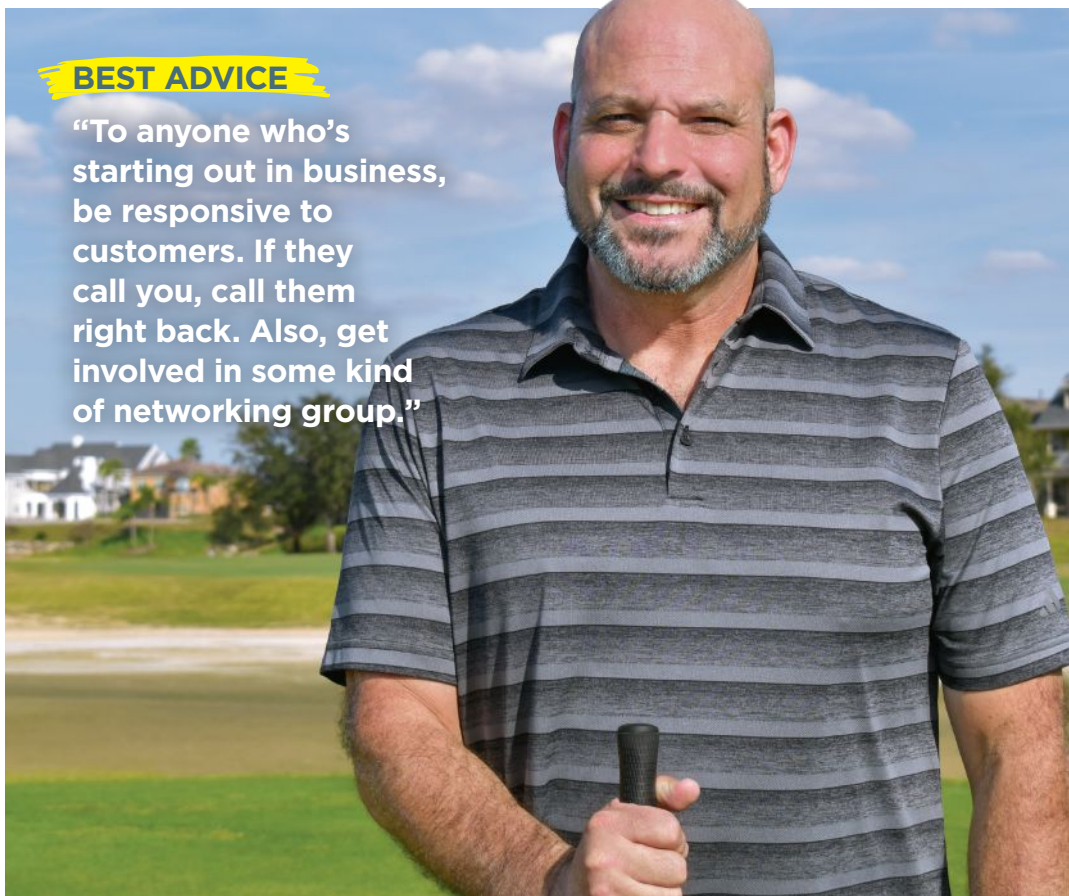


PHOTO: MATT FREEDMAN



# Focusing on the future at American Landscape Systems

BY LAUREN H. DOWDLE | CONTRIBUTOR

**R**etaining employees during a time of uncertainty set up American Landscape Systems (ALS) for success, giving them a 39-percent increase in revenue from 2022 to 2023. That landed them at No. 96 on the 2024 LM150 list with a growth ranking of No. 18.

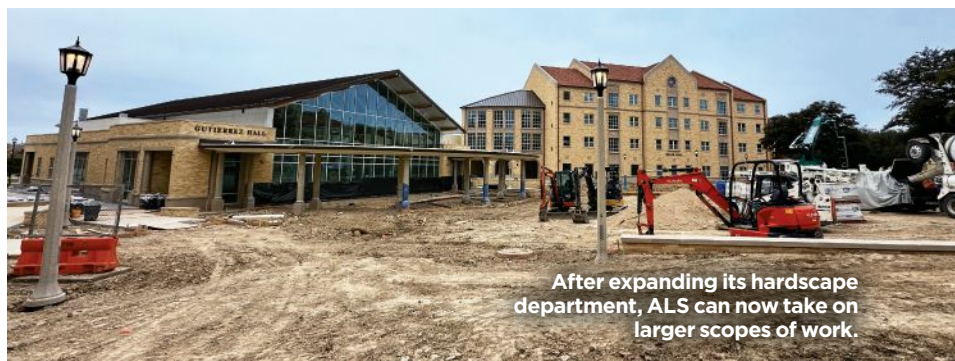
The company, located in Lewisville, Texas, provides landscape installation, irrigation, hardscape, playground/site furniture and full-service grounds maintenance to commercial properties in the Dallas/Fort Worth metroplex.

Joseph Angelone, American Landscape Systems' vice president and CFO, says the company's growth was a product of its work in the previous years. The company did everything it could to keep its employees during COVID-19 when many companies laid off or offered work-from-home options.

"In 2022, we had plenty of employees and work, and we were able to focus on maximizing profits in all different areas of the company, including expanding our hardscape department," he says.

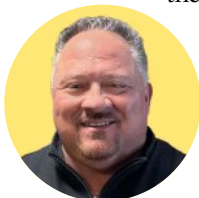
Angelone says that allowed the company to take on larger scopes of work and do the projects itself, which improved the company's top and bottom lines. It was able to offer a turnkey solution for the exterior of any commercial project, no matter the size.

"We have always offered to cover these scopes of work, but when you can self-perform them instead of hiring subs, it takes growth to another level," Angelone says.



After expanding its hardscape department, ALS can now take on larger scopes of work.

ALS invested additional profits in equipment, training, staff and supervision to perform all hardscape services in-house. Clients immediately began adding this type of work to their contracts, which led to the company's largest growth year to date, he says.



Joseph Angelone

While the company experienced significant growth, it also faced obstacles during that time, most notably regarding employee retention, Angelone says.

Finding talent became even more difficult after the pandemic, especially because other companies offered well above market price for managers, he says. To overcome this hurdle, Angelone says ALS decided to reward loyalty with profit bonuses based on the growth the leadership team knew was coming.

"It made it hectic for a little while, but in the long run, our managers bought into the process," Angelone says. "When this happens, you can hire and promote with the confidence that your managers will treat the company as their own because decisions they are making daily have a direct impact on their compensation."

Angelone encourages other professionals not to be afraid of keeping employees aware and making them part of the process, which is what ALS strives to do with its 350 employees.

"We are running a for-profit business, and I believe if the employees don't know what leads to that profit, they may never put in the effort to get there," Angelone says.

In the future, he says having the capacity and space to cover the whole Dallas metro area will play an important role in the company's growth.

"We will need satellite storage and yard space to cover the work that is continuing to push farther south and north of Dallas/Fort Worth," Angelone says.

Going above and beyond to bring their clients' visions to life will also continue to be a part of ALS' goal.

"Managing a client's expectations of a finished product is one of the most important parts of our success," Angelone says. "When we leave the job, we want the client to always believe that we gave them everything they were supposed to get or that they envisioned for their project." 

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](mailto:BryanC@marianipremiergroup.com).

# A foundation for effective group decision-making

**A**s landscaping leaders, we are tasked with making decisions large and small every day. Should we invest in a new piece of equipment? Should we hire that next employee? Should we take on a project that we've never done before?

In my more than two decades of running companies, I have found that an effective decision-making process is one of the most crucial elements of success. This is especially true for group decisions made by teams of all types.

While group decision-making might appear straightforward, numerous challenges and pitfalls can arise that will hinder our teams from achieving successful outcomes. These difficulties exist at every level of an organization, from executives to installation crews. Regardless of the size of your company, you will inevitably face moments where a group must make a critical decision about your organization's direction.

Some common challenges in group decision-making include reaching a false consensus (people say they agree, but they are lying), weak consensus (people initially agree, but change their tune if anything goes amiss), or failing to reach any consensus at all.

## THE HUMAN OPERATING SYSTEM

Complicating matters further is the fact that people are people. We each operate with a set of governing values that influence our interactions with each other and our decision-making process. Chris Argyris, Ph.D., an American business theorist and

**“While group decision-making might appear straightforward, numerous challenges and pitfalls can arise that will hinder our teams from achieving successful outcomes.”**

former professor at Yale and Harvard, identified and organized these values into a framework often called the Human Operating System.

According to the system, individuals universally prioritize the following four goals when interacting with others (and when making decisions):

- 1. Win, avoid losing.** No one wants to lose in interpersonal interactions, so we often make suboptimal decisions to avoid losing.
- 2. Maintain control.** Everyone wants to be in control of their life.
- 3. Avoid embarrassment.** No one wants to be embarrassed in front of others.
- 4. Always appear rational.** Being seen as irrational by others is embarrassing (No. 3) and can cause you to lose control of a situation (No. 2), which means you lose (No. 1)!

At a psychological level, humans are naturally risk-averse and hesitant to be perceived as wrong by

their peers. When each team member subconsciously weighs decisions against these four personal concerns, group decision-making can easily be derailed. The first three values are emotion-based and can throw off a process. The last value relies on data since using data to make decisions is rational.

## WHY UNDERSTANDING PEOPLE MATTERS

Effective decision-making is not just about logic and strategy; it also requires an understanding of human psychology. People want to win, be in control, avoid embarrassment and appear logical. These subconscious tendencies often negatively influence how teams function and make decisions. Understanding people is the foundation for great group decision-making.

For the last 20 years, I have used a group decision-making framework that takes full advantage of the Human Operating System. This framework is a little like decision-making judo and helps teams articulate assumptions, navigate critical decisions that need to be made with clarity and make more effective, timely choices.

In my next column, I will outline that framework and share examples. Do you or your people follow the Human Operating System? Where do you see it most frequently? Here's to better group decisions! 🍷







**BY JEFFREY SCOTT**

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

# Building sales teams for long-term success

**S**ales management is the keystone of your sales team's success. It usually starts with the owner as sales manager, but eventually a dedicated leader takes the reins. This position is worth the investment because a well-run sales force will drive long-term company value. However, sales teams are not one-size-fits-all.

## KEY ROLES IN A STRONG SALES TEAM

A high-performing team includes the following:

- **Sales manager.** Oversees the sales team, sets targets, monitors performance metrics and ensures alignment with company goals. Pro tip: Their success is based on the ability to not only hire and train new salespeople, but to constantly streamline, automate and improve the sales process. They need to understand marketing and be good integrators of people and processes. Is your company too small for that role? Don't wait too long to figure this out. Blended roles can hold you back.
- **Business developer.** Focuses on generating leads through outbound efforts, not waiting for the phone to ring. The owner often fills this role, but it's a critical role to be staffed in commercial companies. Pro tip: Most commercial firms wait too long to hire this role.



- **Sales consultant/estimator.** Specializes in meeting clients, conducting site visits, creating proposals and closing deals. Pro tip: In some firms, the estimating role is separated, especially for bid/build.
- **Account manager.** Maintains relationships with maintenance clients, ensuring satisfaction, enhancements, referrals and securing repeat business. This position can sell new accounts that are direct referrals, especially on the commercial side. Pro tip: As you scale, even this role should specialize.
- **Administrative support.** Screens incoming leads. Manages CRM updates, proposal documentation and follow-ups, allowing sales reps to focus on selling. Pro tip: This role depends greatly on the larger organization and target market.
- **Project management.** Not technically a sales team role, but it's important to consider alongside your sales team. Pro tip: The less project management a salesperson does, the more he or she can focus on sales.

## SPECIALIZATION IS KEY

Out of necessity, smaller companies create mixed roles, which will give you mixed results. Specialization of sales roles is critical to scaling. For example, hunters focus on acquiring new clients, while farmers nurture existing accounts. It is not easy to turn an inbound salesperson into a business developer, no matter how easy it might have been for you as owner.

## DETERMINING THE RIGHT SALES TEAM SIZE

How many reps should be on your team? Consider the following:

- **It takes three.** One or two sales reps is the start of a team, but truly dynamic teams have three or more reps. This creates a positive vibe of friendly competition.
- **Sales goals.** Define realistic goals based on historical performance, industry benchmarks and market potential. Now, \$2 to \$3 million is the new \$1 million, so it may be time to reassess assumptions.
- **Sales cycle length.** Longer sales cycles may require fewer sales reps with strong backlog management. Depending on large jobs only has its own risks.
- **Lead volume.** Consider the mix of inbound versus outbound leads and the number of sales opportunities available. As you increase marketing, you will need to increase the amount of energy needed to screen leads. Either way, an enhanced website to prescreen will help.
- **Role definition.** Assess how many different tasks you have assigned to your sales reps. Removing non-sales tasks and extra steps — while adding automation — can help them focus and sell more than in previous year.

## THE FOUNDATION MATTERS

A well-managed, well-structured sales team will become the backbone of your growth. If you are looking to refine your sales structure and learn from industry leaders, consider joining our community of 125-plus landscaping companies. Connect with peers, access proven strategies and take your sales performance to the next level. Visit [JeffreyScott.biz](http://JeffreyScott.biz).





BY BOB MANN

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

# The accidental advocate

I got into government relations by accident. You see, I never aspired to wear a suit and tie and walk the halls of government buildings talking to politicians about turf and ornamentals. No, I wanted to be outdoors in the fresh air like everyone else in our industry.

But I was working in the Northeast, a part of the country that can be particularly hostile to the green industry on a number of important issues, including fertilizer and pesticide use, gasoline-powered equipment and a host of other things.

In 2013, the New England Interstate Water Pollution Control Commission, or NEIWPCC (pronounced “new-ee-pick” ... these people were terrible at the government acronym naming game), put together voluntary guidelines for turfgrass fertilizer use with the premise that our applications to lawns were a significant source of water pollution. Certainly, when fertilizer is inappropriately applied, we can expect runoff to occur, and that fertilizer will wind up in the nearest body of water.

I thought this group had a preordained conclusion — to significantly reduce the amount of fertilizer being applied to turf through regulation — and that they were going through the motions to justify that conclusion. In March of that year, I sat through a stakeholder meeting that brought together groups ranging from the Environmental Protection Agency to fertilizer manufacturers to state agencies and environmental groups. And then there was little ol’ me, the skunk at the garden party, representing the industry they thought was responsible for this mess.



After that stakeholder meeting, a draft document was circulated for review. It wasn’t terrible, but it needed work, in my opinion. I put together comments to submit with my thoughts, but before I could finish writing them, we learned that a state representative in New Hampshire had filed legislation codifying what was in the NEIWPCC draft. It wasn’t even finalized, and this legislator wanted to make it a law!


On the day the bill was to have a hearing, my boss told me he wasn’t available to travel to Concord and that I was to represent our interests. So, I put on my suit and tie and traveled north. When I got there, I quickly discovered that I was the only person in the jam-packed room who would testify against the bill.

When my turn to testify came, I blasted it with both barrels. I told them that the language was lifted directly from the NEIWPCC draft document, contained several items we disagreed with, and that the legislation was premature and would significantly harm our ability to service our customers. When I finished, there were boos and catcalls from the audience. I returned to my seat for the remainder of the hearing. Once it concluded, I got up and made my way out of the building;

there was no reason to hang around, and I had a long drive home.

As I walked out of the building, I heard an angry voice calling my name, telling me to stop. It was the committee chairman chasing after me. Out came his index finger pointed at me as he tried to tell me a thing or two about what I had to say in the hearing. In response, out came my index finger, and I gave as good as I got. At one point, one of my lobbyist friends walked up to witness this angry exchange, and I noticed the look of horror on her face as two men had a very intense exchange on the steps of the New Hampshire Capitol.

When this gentleman had finished telling me why I was wrong and how our industry was ruining the environment, his face brightened, and he said, “By the way, I am one of your customers. You guys do a great job!” You could have knocked me over with a feather. That’s another thing that I’ve gotten used to in my job — cognitive dissonance.

Ultimately, states in the Northeast enacted legislation restricting plant nutrients that we could live with and incorporate into our best management practices. It’s just wild how we sometimes get over the finish line. 





# Negotiating your earnout



**BY PHIL HARWOOD**

The author is a senior advisor with Tamarisk Business Advisors. Reach him at phil.harwood@tamariskadvisors.com

If you're thinking about selling your business, your earnout deserves special attention.

In an earnout, the buyer may offer the seller a higher number but with strings attached. The valuation is based on future projections, which may or may not be realized. The seller can earn more than he or she initially wanted, but also has the risk of earning less based on criteria to be negotiated.

The earnout can be beneficial because the seller receives some of the purchase amount over time. This means the buyer needs less cash to close and may not need third-party financing. It also provides the buyer a potential offset for indemnification claims.

Some of the risks include the seller losing control of the business, making it difficult to hit the earnout targets. If the seller stays on in a management role, he or she is self-interested and may not be on the same page as the buyer. In turn, the buyer may need to delay integration during the earnout period.

There are some questions to consider about the earnout itself. First, what is the earnout amount? Typically, it is 10 to 25 percent of the total sale price. The buyer generally prefers a higher percentage, while the seller generally prefers a lower percentage. Is the amount a fixed dollar amount or a percentage? Based on what? Is there an aggregate cap? How about a shortfall ramp-up?

Next, what's the earnout's duration? Typically, it's one to five years. The buyer generally prefers a longer period, while the seller generally prefers a shorter period. The buyer

typically gains more control over time, making it more difficult for the seller to control the earnout results. Longer time periods may be better structured with the seller as a creditor or preferred shareholder.

Next, what are the criteria? Typically, a buyer prefers metrics closer to net profit, while a seller prefers metrics closer to revenue. Middle-ground metrics are earnings before interest and taxes (EBIT) or earnings before interest, taxes and amortization (EBITDA).

Nonfinancial metrics may include a new product or service launch, customer retention or whatever is most meaningful to achieve during the earnout period. Keep it simple. The more complex, the more potential for disagreement and litigation.

Let's look at some other considerations. Negotiating the fine details of an earnout is one of the most overlooked areas of the transaction.

**Accounting integration** affects the ability to calculate the earnout amount. Buyers are often interested in integrating accounting systems during the earnout period. Sellers prefer to maintain the status quo so their earnout performance may be properly calculated. Third-party audits to verify earnout results are a good solution.

**Transaction-related expenses** include fees for attorneys, accountants, consultants and more. The accounting treatment affects financial results, so don't overlook this area. Buyers prefer to include these expenses in current income calculations because they reduce net profit and the earnout if tied to net profit. Sellers prefer to exclude these expenses from earnout calculations.

There may be **extraordinary expenses**, such as nonordinary gains or losses, insurance proceeds, tax implications, force majeure events, etc., that arise during the earnout period. If so, their accounting treatment may impact financial results and the seller's earnout.

**Depreciation** treatment greatly affects financial results. Buyers prefer step-up in basis to gain more depreciation expense. Sellers prefer to maintain historical depreciation treatment. Again, there is a potential for conflict if not negotiated up front.

The accounting treatment of **overhead** impacts financial results. Buyers prefer overhead to be recalculated as part of their integration, while sellers prefer to maintain the status quo during the earnout period.

The **integration of business operations** may affect the seller's ability to achieve and calculate earnout performance, but delays in integration affect the buyer's ability to benefit from integration. Buyers prefer faster integration while sellers prefer slower or no integration.

**Legal considerations** — disclaimers, representations, warranties and remedies — are vital. Consider using third parties to calculate earnouts and set-offs and working with a qualified escrow agent to hold funds until disagreements are resolved.

All details are negotiable but are often overlooked in the rush to get the deal done. Earnouts that are not well-designed and negotiated often result in litigation. By taking a few extra steps before closing, there is a better chance for a smooth transition.

Now go forth. 🍀

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## RESOURCES

### [ DEALER DEALINGS ]

## Forming a relationship

How do you keep a good relationship with your dealers and distributors? What tips do you have to make the most of these key business partnerships?

If you have any key insights and experiences to help other landscape pros with forming and maintaining relationships with dealers and distributors, shoot us a message! Contact Associate Editors Nathan Mader ([nmader@northcoastmedia.net](mailto:nmader@northcoastmedia.net)) and Rob DiFranco ([rdifranco@northcoastmedia.net](mailto:rdifranco@northcoastmedia.net)) with your news for a chance to be featured in an upcoming edition of *Landscape Management*.



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BY MARTY GRUNDER

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## Lessons from Mildred and Tad

**W**hen I started my business over 40 years ago, my great aunts were among my first customers. They lived together in a nice, small home with a beautiful rose garden. It was a great testing ground for me to learn landscaping; they had finicky plants and were particular about how they wanted it maintained.

I always called them before my mom would drive me to work at their house, and my Aunt Mildred told me I was better than the company she used before because she could never reach them. I learned at a very young age how important good communication was, and this is still what my companies are known for today.

That wasn't the only business lesson I learned from my Aunts Mildred and Tad. Aunt Mildred was a spitfire. She was tough as nails and worked in a bakery — quite the dichotomy — but she always had a soft spot for me because I reminded her of her favorite brother.

Aunt Tad was a brilliant businesswoman in an era when it was rare — and difficult — for women to own small businesses. She owned a refrigeration company, an automatic door company that worked with grocery stores and an electric motor business in the '50s, '60s and '70s. She never met a stranger and was sharp as a tack.

As International Women's Day nears, I look back with even more respect for my aunts, what they accomplished and all the challenges they must've faced along the way.

**“Be tenacious and relentless but also invest in the relationships and the community around you.”**

As a dad with three daughters and now two granddaughters, I'm grateful for women like Mildred and Tad who paved the way.

There were four things I saw my aunts doing constantly that I think made them successful:

**They persevered.** Owning a small business is never easy, although many entrepreneurs make it look that way. There will be challenges and hard days. We must persevere and do our best to look on the bright side. A bad attitude won't make the challenge any easier to solve, but it may drive away people who could help you.

**They focused on their strengths.** Mildred was a fantastic baker, and Tad was a sharp businesswoman. They excelled in their roles and were successful because they stayed focused on what they could do well. Embracing the individual strengths and perspectives that every team member brings to the table makes our companies great.

**They valued relationships.** In the era in which Mildred and Tad worked, in-person business was more common than it is today. They didn't have the technology we do, so business was done over landline phones or face-to-face. We can use the technology we have to work more efficiently, but I think it's vital that we remain committed to relationships that are best

built face-to-face. Networking and relationships led to our largest sales at Grunder Landscaping Co. this year — one single lunch meeting led to more than \$2 million in sales in 2024.

**They accepted help when they needed it.** Mildred and Tad's successes were all their own, but they were supported by the community around them. I think it's important today that we think about how we can be part of a community that uplifts the people around us — whether that community is local or scattered across the country. This month, I encourage you to think about how you can give back with the experience you have.





I do my best to share what I know and support our community of landscape pros in my work at The Grow Group. You can get the tips and tricks I share weekly by following @growgroup\_ on Instagram or subscribing to our emails: [growgroupinc.com/weekly-great-idea](https://growgroupinc.com/weekly-great-idea).

The lessons I learned from my aunts were simple, but I've found that the best business lessons usually are. As we prepare for the spring season ahead, here's my challenge to you: Let's be like Mildred and Tad. Be tenacious and relentless but also invest in the relationships and the community around you. Even as years pass, that recipe for success never gets old. 🌱

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