

# Opportunities on the horizon

How business might operate in 2002:

	<b>DOWNSIDE</b>	<b>SMART STRATEGY:</b>	<b>UPSIDE</b>	<b>SMART STRATEGY:</b>
<b>Residential design/build</b>	Clients will hesitate to commit to projects, may defer additional phases	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Contact customers concerning their needs, schedules, issues</li> <li>2 Suggest changes of schedule, production, phasing, financing to suit their needs and keep jobs profitable</li> </ol>	Mortgage rates are low, encouraging "closer to home" consumers to spend on new homes, sales, refinancing and personal property	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Market affordable financing for landscape and personal property investments, value of investment for resale and enjoyment</li> <li>2 Market more aggressively for new clients; reward customer referrals</li> </ol>
<b>Residential maintenance</b>	Clients concerned with personal finances may be receptive to low-ballers or opt for DIY	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Differentiate your services in a way that is meaningful to customers</li> <li>2 Market your quality and special services</li> </ol>	Clients still have limited time/ability to maintain their properties. High-end homeowners unlikely to DIY	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Market how your services improve the value of their investment in home</li> <li>2 Reinforce convenience factor</li> </ol>
<b>Commercial design/build</b>	Commercial design/build projects may slow, be postponed or get trimmed dramatically	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Know your cost structure and adjust systems to make profits on every job</li> <li>2 Accommodate clients' changing financial, timing, personnel or other management needs</li> <li>3 Proactively suggest improvements, ideas, additional services</li> </ol>	New and renovation projects will continue to come online, with value-conscious managers, possible new priorities	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Communicate closely with current and prospective customers</li> <li>2 Adapt estimates based on your profit and clients' requirements</li> <li>3 Revisit previous clients for possible business</li> <li>4 Network for new contacts</li> </ol>
<b>Commercial maintenance</b>	Commercial, multifamily and institutional property owners may cut budgets and be receptive to low-balling, despite ongoing relationships with current landscapers	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Sew up 2002 business now</li> <li>2 Look for longer-term contracts</li> <li>3 Market unique, quality service and customer care</li> <li>4 Proactively suggest cost savings, win-win innovations</li> <li>5 "Partner" to provide value and special help</li> </ol>	Commercial maintenance work continues to be in demand, especially as vacant space hurts their bottom line	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Revisit previous clients and network for new</li> <li>2 Market unique services, partner approach</li> </ol>
<b>Chemical lawn care</b>	Residential lawn care clients may decide this "necessity" is now a "luxury"	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Reinforce benefits of professional lawn care services</li> <li>2 Market convenience and importance of keeping up property</li> </ol>	Lawn care still a relatively inexpensive (compared to other landscape services) way to maintain property appearance	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Adjust service packages to enhance value for consumers</li> <li>2 Market services aggressively to new customers</li> <li>3 Offer prepay discounts</li> </ol>
<b>Irrigation, arbor care, specialty services, upgrades</b>	Clients may postpone or cancel these services going into 2002	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Adjust service packages to encourage project commitment now</li> <li>2 Know cost structure and adjust to ensure continued profitability</li> </ol>	Irrigation, arbor care and specialty services continue to play key roles in landscape health and benefits. Some work can't wait	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Work with customer to adjust scheduling, project phasing, payment, financing, etc., with the goal to gain contracts and follow-through commitments</li> <li>2 Proactively suggest adjustments, ideas, innovations for a win-win go-ahead</li> </ol>
<b>Labor</b>	Employees worry as they see volume decline and customer orders slow	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 If it's worth it, share a reduced workload to keep valued employees working</li> <li>2 Continue training to develop employees and offer customers extra value</li> <li>3 Use normally slow winter months to pare payrolls and reconfigure crews for 2002</li> </ol>	Layoffs in the Green Industry and elsewhere add to the pool of potential employees for 2002	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Recruit early to get quality employees available from other Green Industry companies</li> <li>2 Great opportunity to recruit excellent middle manager, supervisor or foremen candidates from other industries</li> </ol>
<b>Competition</b>	Expect new competitive and price pressures at every level: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>✓ Layoffs = new entry-level startups</li> <li>✓ Low/mid-budget firms move to wealthier clients</li> <li>✓ Residential firms go into light commercial</li> <li>✓ Commercial contractors seek larger clients</li> <li>✓ Design/builders seek government bid projects</li> </ul>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Know your cost structure and price for profit</li> <li>2 Increase or maintain prices, depending on your market conditions</li> <li>3 Consider moving to new customer segments</li> <li>4 Partner with existing clients to offer additional value, rather than price-driven work</li> <li>5 Market experience, awards, accolades, long-time customer programs to emphasize stability, professionalism</li> </ol>	Natural selection will occur. Unprofitable businesses will not fare well in highly competitive markets	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Analyze costs and profit structure for maximum efficiencies</li> <li>2 Price for profitability, not volume</li> <li>3 Analyze viability of low-profit services. Drop or adjust service packages accordingly</li> <li>4 Analyze viability of low-profit customers. Make adjustments as needed</li> <li>5 Opportunities exist to capitalize on competitors' weaknesses</li> <li>6 Opportunities exist for acquisitions on favorable terms</li> </ol>



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"I believe we are moving temporarily into a selling economy, not a buying economy," adds Tom Tolkacz, president of Swingle Tree & Landscape Care, Denver, CO. "We are now competing for a smaller pie of money and are being weighed against different things."

Jeff Aronson, president, As You Like It

**"SOMEONE ONCE TOLD ME THE FIRST THING TO DO IN A DOWNTURN IS RAISE PRICES, AND IT WAS THE BEST ADVICE I'VE EVER GOTTEN. YOU'LL HAVE LESS CUSTOMERS BUT THOSE YOU HAVE WILL STAY."**

— PHIL FOGARTY

& Potomac Valley Landscaping, Potomac, MD, notes, "We are giving a lot of estimates and proposals and have a lot on the table. The jobs aren't closing at the same rate as the fall of 2000, but we are not losing jobs either. Clients just seem to be a little slower in their decision making."

### Design/build bump

While many contractors have their hands full with ongoing construction projects, others are planning to encourage clients to continue or commit to projects now.

"Listening to the clients and providing the products and services they want will be vital," cautions Willig. "Sales, design and project management staff must be trained to do the work requested...and be sensitive to costs."

"We're concentrating on building bridges with clients and creating relationships," notes David Snodgrass, president of Dennis' Seven Dees Landscaping Inc., Portland, OR. "We're building up the level of our performance and want to be on more of their short lists."

"Mortgage rates are hitting the lowest in

40 years and many are considering refinancing," says Rod Bailey, consultant, Alder Springs Enterprises, Woodinville, WA.

"What a marvelous chance to upgrade or finish that landscape project. There is a tremendous need for the landscape community to be proactive about this. Everyone who wants to do-it-yourself is open to be sold on having it done right by a pro."

### Necessity vs. luxury

No one expects customers to stop using landscape maintenance or lawn care services, but many still expect changes.

"A general slowdown in the economy will take out marginal customers — those who want the services but had to stretch the budget to afford it," notes Charles King, King Green Inc., Norcross, GA.

Ewald Altstadt, director of operations for Lawn Doctor, Holmdel, NJ, sees the new "stay at home" consumer as an opportunity. "People will be at home on their property and we need to take steps to jump on that opportunity to talk with them about our services."

While many pros focus on commercial customer relationships, they see price cutting as a potential problem.

"Commercial property managers are look-

**"WE'RE GOING TO FOLLOW UP EVERY LEAD, GOOD OR BAD, NO MATTER WHAT. IN THE PAST, WE JUST TOOK ORDERS. NOW, WE'RE ACTUALLY GOING TO START SELLING."**

— DAVE WILLIAMS

ing at value as well as the relationship," says Scott Brickman, president of The Brickman Group, Langhorne, PA. "The relationships will continue to be important but also expect to hear, 'We're hurting...I'm getting pressure.'"

Resist the urge to cut prices, he says. "The worst thing to do is to go out and cut prices.

**"GRASS GROWS JUST AS FAST IN A RECESSION AS IT DOES IN A BOOM."**

— ROD BAILEY

Keep pricing where it needs to be."

"Someone once told me the first thing to do in a downturn is raise prices, and it was the best advice I've ever gotten. You'll have less customers but those you have will stay," notes Phil Fogarty, sub-master franchisor for Weed Man/Turf Holdings Inc., Cleveland, OH.

### Opportunities knock

Preparing your organization is one thing; understanding your opportunities and taking advantage of them is another.

"We're going to follow up every lead, good or bad, no matter what. In the past, we just took orders. Now, we're actually going to start selling," explains Dave Williams, owner of Rainy Days Irrigation Inc., Garner, NC.

"I strongly advise lawn care companies to plan ahead for a potentially difficult winter," adds Jim Campanella, owner of The Lawn Dawg, Nashua, NH. "Offer customers incentives to renew and prepay early...Use the down time in winter to bring in new business. Call back people who received estimates but did not use your services."

"Marketing is the one input in your business that can bring in sales," says Marty Grunder, president, Grunder Landscaping Co., Miamisburg, OH. "We're signing up contracts and hustling. We have an attitude of 'think spring' already."

Although competition may be more intense, demand will continue. As Rod Bailey notes, "Grass grows just as fast in a recession as it does in a boom." **LJM**



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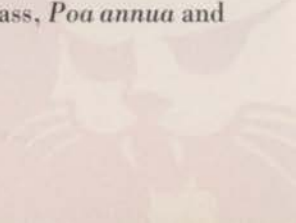


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Graduated from The Ohio State University with bachelor's of science in horticulture

**June 1969**

Hired by Thornton Landscape, Inc.

**1971**

Attends first ALCA meeting

**1983**

Elected president of the Ohio Nursery Association

**1999**

Bought Thornton Landscape, Inc.

**2002**

In line to become president of ALCA

# People of the Year 2001

These outstanding people exemplify professionalism, dedication and a willingness to share their time and energy for our industry

## Landscape contracting: Rick Doesburg / President, Thornton Landscape, Inc., Maineville, OH

BY JASON STAHL

**E**ver since he was 14, working at South Euclid Garden Supply in Ohio, Rick Doesburg knew he wanted to pursue a Green Industry career.

"I just enjoyed working with people, and once I gained more knowledge, I got a kick out of being able to diagnose turfgrass diseases," Doesburg says.

Now, he's getting a kick out of running his own company, Thornton Landscape, Inc., which he bought in 1999 after 25 years as one of its employees.

His single most important professional achievement? "Putting together and being part of a wonderful team at my company geared toward quality and 'beauty by design,'" he says. Doesburg says it's this team that allows him get involved with associations, another thing he's proud of.

But friend Kurt Kluznik, president of Yardmaster, Inc., Painesville, OH, who claims he would have never gotten in-

involved in ALCA without Doesburg's prodding, feels there's another reason why Doesburg is able to accomplish so much. "I'd call him the velvet hammer if he was in sales with me because he knows how to get things done without being too assertive," Kluznik says.

That kind of skill came in handy in 1999 when Doesburg almost left Thornton Landscape because, as he says, "we didn't seem to have a good focus of where we were going." But now he says his company is poised to stay on top as a cutting edge leader of design/build landscape.

Staying on top won't be easy, says Doesburg, who believes the government will be responsible for some of the biggest challenges the Green Industry will face within the next decade. "Legislation, taxes, social security, OSHA — all that has a tremendous impact on our ability to be profitable. If we don't look out for ourselves, nobody will."

That's why Doesburg believes association work is so important. "People have to break away from their business and give something back," he says.

Doesburg has certainly done his share, whether it be with ALCA, the Ohio Nursery Association, Cincinnati Homebuilders or the Green Industry Expo. "What I am is what I've learned from ALCA," he says. He has not only advanced those associations with his own work but helped others make their mark.

"He was always there to help me out when I needed it, like when I took leadership positions in ALCA," says Jud Griggs, vice president of operations at Smallwood Design Group/Smallwood Landscape, Inc., Naples, FL, and former ALCA president.

"Some people take on things because they want notoriety, but the best thing about Rick is that he prefers to stay in the background," Griggs added.

The reason Doesburg bought Thornton Landscape was because his son, Andy, was graduating from college. "We had always talked about starting a business, and that gave me an opportunity to work with him." Now, Andy works in sales, and Rick is hoping he takes over the business some day. **LJM**

## Grounds management: George Van Haasteren / Director-Grounds, Dwight-Englewood School, Englewood, NJ

BY RON HALL

**G**eorge Van Haasteren, CGM, is no comedian, although sometimes he tries. In describing his college football days, he says he played end, tackle and guard. "I sat on the end of the bench, guarded the water bucket and tackled anyone who came near," he says.

This big man with a hearty demeanor has the rare ability to pack 25 hours of activity into every 24-hour day. Much of that energy is directed at being the best grounds professional he can be — and helping others achieve a similar goal.

"Many people believe that anybody can run a grounds maintenance operation," says Van Haasteren. "They don't realize that it takes years of training and education to be successful in this profession."

Van Haasteren should know. He's been advancing the profession of grounds management for 20-plus years, starting with the Paramus (NJ) Shade Tree and

Parks Department in 1981. His career includes three years as grounds manager at Columbia University, New York City, and almost 15 years as director of grounds at the 30-acre campus of Dwight-Englewood School.

"He really turned our grounds around," says Kevin Herron, director of the physical plant at the prestigious private K-12 school of about 1,000 students.

"In addition to the landscape, he's responsible for five athletic fields on campus and a couple of fields in a county park."

Van Haasteren says childhood experiences on nearby sandlots led him, ultimately, to become the first grounds manager in the State of New Jersey to gain certification from the Professional Grounds Management Society (PGMS) and, this year, president of that organization.

"When we were kids we played baseball morning, noon and night," he says. "There was a little area between a library and some tennis courts, and we built our own baseball field and made our own ground rules. For instance, if you hit the ball over the tennis nets you had a double, and

if you hit it to the school, you had a home run."

This love of sport led Van Haasteren to excel in football, eventually making the University of Miami (FL) squad. In a sense, those experiences still drive him. In addition to his duties at Dwight-Englewood School, he and partner Ken Krausz, CGCS, own Sports Fields Management, Inc., a firm specializing in athletic field construction and maintenance. One of its clients is Paramus Catholic High School, Paramus, NJ.

"George has done great things with our fields," says Steve Degregorio, PCHS athletic director and head football coach. "Before he started here there was a 50-by-70-yard area that was bumpy with rocks, twigs and glass. It was awful. Now it's a gorgeous field."

Tom Shaner, executive director of the PGMS, says that Van Haasteren's ability to work as a team player is, perhaps, his greatest gift. "Like a good captain, George seeks out and recruits the best player, or member in this case, to meet every challenge," says Shaner. **LM**

### CAREER TIMELINE



#### 1972-1976

Attended University of Miami, Coral Gables, FL

#### 1981-1987

Boro of Paramus (NJ) Shade Tree and Parks Department

#### 1987-1995

Director of Grounds: Dwight-Englewood School, Englewood, NJ

#### 1995-1998

Grounds Manager for Columbia University, New York City

#### 1997-Present

Grounds Manager for Paramus Catholic High School

#### 1998-Present

Director of Grounds: Dwight-Englewood School, Englewood, NJ

#### 1997-2000

Chair for PGMS Certification Committee

#### 2001

President of the Professional Grounds Management Society

## CAREER TIMELINE

**1956**

Degree in Veterinary Medicine, The Ohio State University

**1957-1961**

School of Aviation Medicine, U.S. Space Program, San Antonio, TX

**1960s**

Toxicologist with private industry

**1970s**

The Ohio State University cooperative extension

**1977**

Begins consulting work with ChemLawn

**1984**

Leaves OSU to work full-time at ChemLawn

**1990-1991**

Testifies in Senate Subcommittee hearings on lawn care pesticides

**2001**

Retires from TruGreen ChemLawn

## Lawn care: Roger Yeary / Vice president of health, safety and environmental stewardship of TruGreen ChemLawn, Delaware, OH

BY RON HALL

**M**any lawn care company owners probably weren't in the business when the industry faced its most bitter battles concerning lawn care chemical use. Nor are you probably aware that one of the industry's influential figures during those times is quietly leaving the industry.

Dr. Roger Yeary retired from TruGreen ChemLawn earlier this year, but remains as a consultant with the company until the end of this year. A toxicologist, he still makes once-a-week trips to the TG-CL research facility in Delaware, OH.

"Probably what I'm going to do is spend the winter months in Arizona and the summer and fall months in Columbus," Yeary tells LM.

Yeary's career took several twists before he began his 25-plus-year association with lawn care. He earned a degree in vet-

erinary medicine at The Ohio State University, Columbus, in 1956, but several months into a practice in Willoughby, OH, he was coaxed into joining the U.S. Air Force School of Aviation Medicine in San Antonio, TX.

Yeary fulfilled his military commitment working with a small group of specialists developing environmental systems for space flight, part of the U.S. space race with the Soviets. It was during this time that he became interested in toxicology.

In 1977, then with The Ohio State University cooperative extension, he got a call from ChemLawn which was fielding concerns from homeowners fearful of the safety of lawn care products on their pets.

"I started doing some consulting for them," says Yeary. "I did that about four years and finally realized that I was working 2 full-time jobs, so I left the university and went to work for ChemLawn fulltime in 1984," he says.

During the tumultuous 1980s, when municipalities across the United States tried to write their own rules concerning

chemical lawn care, the industry looked to ChemLawn and the data generated by Yeary to show that the industry presented negligible risk to employees, customers, their families and pets, and to the environment.

"I've always considered myself to be the guardian of the health and safety of our employees," he says. "Since so many companies copied our programs, I believe that this has had a positive impact on the entire industry."

Yeary, a popular speaker at Green Industry conferences and seminars, participated in dozens of public, legislative and EPA hearings during his career, and defended the industry on national news programs like Ted Koppel and Good Morning America.

"I believe that my most important contribution to the lawn care industry has been defusing the exaggerated and inflammatory claims of the health and environmental risks of lawn care to the media, regulators, legislators and, at times, in the judicial system as an expert witness," he says. **LM**



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# Is H-2B right for you?

**Little-known details about the application process from this industry expert will save you time and trouble**



The H-2B visa can sometimes solve a company's inability to find a dependable labor source.

BY JEFF WEST

**T**o H-2B or not to H-2B? That is the question many companies in various seasonal industries are asking themselves more and more often. As little as four years ago, most service companies in the United States hadn't even heard of an H-2B visa, let alone decided whether to pursue one.

## H-2B defined

The H-2B visa has recently become popular with a number of industries that have had difficulty finding a dependable labor source.

In laymen's terms, the H-2B visa is a tempo-

rary seasonal work visa for companies that cannot find enough domestic labor to run their business. To be eligible for an H-2B visa, your company must prove that the jobs it's trying to fill are temporary and seasonal in nature. For example, if you own a landscape company and lay off workers in the fall or winter due to weather, you would be a prime candidate. If your landscape company is located in, say, Arizona, you must prove you have a peak season by showing noticeable fluctuation in your payroll over several years.

## Finding the workers

Approximately 90% of workers who arrive in the U.S. under H-2B visas are Mexican immigrants; the remaining 10% come from Canada,