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## inside the owner's head

BY RON HALL / EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

# Imagination builds a team

**R**emember working like the dickens to write a great term paper or to finish a big project? I bet you haven't forgotten the guilty pleasure of playing hooky a few days later, either.

### Gone fishin'

One day each July, the "team" at Russo Lawn & Landscape plays hooky. Employees at the 13-year-old landscape company grab their fishing poles, stock the coolers and head out together for a day on the ocean. Sometimes they land stripers and sometimes blue fish...and sometimes not much at all. But they always come back with great stories, and they always have a great time.

"Hey, thanks Mike!" That's what they say when they get back to the dock. That's because owner Mike Russo picks up the tab. It's one of the unique "perks" that make his operation a different place to work. In many respects, Russo is a different kind of an owner as is evidenced by community projects he and his crews do absolutely gratis. But let's focus on the imaginative team-building activities and exercises that make his company such a great place to work.

### Cash, food and parties

For example, the owner gives his "team" an \$800 cash certificate each month. The money is to be used towards any controllable repairs. If any incidents occur that result in controllable damage, the dollar amount of the replacement/repair is de-

ducted from the \$800; the rest is divided among team members.

Pizza, anyone? If all of the company's crews meet or come in below their budgeted man-hours for the week, everyone gets pizza. Career Enhancement Director Samantha Wood wrote it for all to see.

Need a little bit extra in your paycheck this coming month? If you work on Russo's team, you can earn it if you accrue enough points to be selected as "Team Member of the Month." The rules are simple and they're in English and in Spanish. Heck, you might even earn "Team Member of the Year." Francisco Mari won it last year



The whole team at Russo Lawn & Landscape gathers for its July 2002 ocean fishing trip.

Where else do you get a day's pay for putting a fishing pole in your hands?

and earned himself and his family extra cash and a 27-in. television.

We all know what "sick pay" is, but what about paying somebody for "well days?" Mike does. A team member earns

## Russo Lawn and Landscape

▶ AT A GLANCE

**Russo Lawn and Landscape**  
Windsor Locks, CT

**Owner:** Mike Russo

**Year founded:** 1990

**Employees:** 20

**2002 gross revenue:** \$1,350,000

**Services:** Landscape maintenance & installation — 90% commercial and 10% residential

1/2 hour for each week they're on time every day and don't have any early dismissals. You're allowed two paid "well days" each year.

Russo Lawn & Landscape embraced the JP Horizons Pro Training Challenge, and won first place in the program in 2000 and shared first place in 2001. Team members have

continued to meet each week in "Career Enhancement Meetings." That's where the serious stuff takes place.

But there's plenty of fun stuff, too, like an annual holiday party and an annual Success Banquet to start each new season. Besides, where else do you get a day's pay for putting a fishing pole in your hands?

— Information provided by The Owners' Network, a program created by JP Horizons, Inc. and sponsored by Weed Man. Visit the Web site [www.owners1.com](http://www.owners1.com) or call 877/574-5267.

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Green Industry pros must go to high schools to inform young people of potentially rewarding careers.



## Needed: trained shop techs

**D**emand for skilled turf equipment technicians and maintenance shop managers increases daily. The Green Industry offers these trained personnel a range of exciting career opportunities. Too bad that few young people recognize this.

### Working to meet a need

Lake City Community College is trying to change this. It has a long history of training professionals for the Green Industry. Its two-year Golf Course Operations and Landscape Technology programs began in 1967. LCCC's Turf Equipment Management program (TEM) started in 1973, and Irrigation Management began in 1999. These are one-year programs.

TEM was started to meet calls from the golf industry for mechanics trained in maintenance and repair on specific turf equipment. In recent years, the landscape industry has also been seeking more of these potentially valuable team members.

The Lake City program started small and developed slowly, and demand for these students wasn't that great, at least not until the mid-1980s. But that changed when golf's popularity as a televised spectator sport exploded. The public saw immaculately groomed courses on TV and pressured their superintendents for similar conditions. The superintendents, in turn, asked equipment manufacturers for help, and they responded by producing more sophisticated and technically complex machines.

Seemingly overnight, the golf industry began screaming for skilled equipment technicians capable of interpreting equipment manuals, establishing PM pro-

grams, setting up parts rooms, ordering parts properly, grinding and setting reel mowers, managing parts inventory, operating computers and keeping accurate records. Now the landscape industry needs them, too.

Today, graduates of LCCC's TEM program are in high demand. The 15 or 18 students completing the course each year receive several different job offers. Starting salaries range from \$22,000 to \$40,000.

It would seem that recruiting students to a one-year program that can place just about every graduate in a good job would be easy. It's not. Few people recognize it as a profession. Think about it: How many students are counseled into turf equipment mechanics?

### Let's do something

Let's go to high schools to inform young people about this and other potentially rewarding careers in the Green Industry. High school automotive mechanics students are logical recruits, but don't overlook young people considering college. Many of them have no idea what major to pursue. Too often they overlook lucrative careers available through programs like ours.

We must talk to the student groups and invite them, their instructors and their counselors to our facilities so they can see a modern shop loaded with today's sophisticated turf equipment.

The landscape industry needs dedicated and trained young people, and nowhere is this need greater than in its maintenance shops. Who's going to keep our sophisticated turf equipment maintained and repaired?

— *The author is with Lake City Community College. For more information about recruiting students into Green*

*Industry shop management, contact him at*

[piersolj@lakecitycc.edu](mailto:piersolj@lakecitycc.edu)



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NEWS YOU CAN USE

## Shindaiwa teams with ServiceBench

TUALATIN, OR — Shindaiwa, Inc. has teamed with ServiceBench for its online product registrations and electronic submission of warranty claims. The web-based technology of ServiceBench is a complete internet solution for manufacturers, distributors, and dealers in simplifying and speeding up various business to business transactions.

## Stihl to expand VA production facility

VIRGINIA BEACH — Outdoor power equipment manufacturer Stihl Inc. announced it will be expanding its operations in Virginia Beach. Total cost will be \$60.8 million, which will include adding 228,000 sq. ft. to its U.S. headquarters in the Oceana West Corporate Park.

## Encore has new MI distributor

WATERFORD, MI — Encore Mfg. Co. has granted distribution rights for the state of Michigan to X-Sell Distribution. The Encore power equipment line includes riding and walk-behind mowers and dethatchers.

## HSS RentX opens new branches

DENVER, CO — National rental chain HSS RentX has recently opened tool and equipment rental branches in Longview, TX and Oakland, CA. The company says it expects to open additional branches in Virginia and Colorado by mid-year.

[CLIPPINGS]

## D'Avino leads Landscape Group

Advanstar Communications, the parent company of *Landscape Management*, *Golfdom*, *Pest Control* and the recently launched *Landscape Design/Build*, is pleased to announce that Tony D'Avino has been named Group Publisher for the Advanstar Landscape and Pest Control Group.

D'Avino comes to the group from Penton Media, Inc., where he most recently served as Group Publisher of *Material Handling Management*, *Transportation and Distribution* and *Supply Chain Technologies*. He replaces John Payne, who served as Group Publisher from 1995 until early 2003.

"We're extremely fortunate to have



D'Avino hopes to build on the success of the Landscape and Pest Control Group.

Tony joining our team as we continue to grow our businesses in the landscape, golf and pest control markets," said Alex DeBarr, Advanstar Executive Vice President. "We'd also like to wish John Payne all the best in his next endeavor and offer our thanks for his efforts over the past seven years."

D'Avino said he's excited to take on the new role. "This is a great chance to work with the most-

respected and fastest-growing group of magazines in our industry. We intend to continue our partnership with our readers and advertisers to build on that success."

D'Avino can be reached at 800/225-4569 or [tdavino@advanstar.com](mailto:tdavino@advanstar.com).

## John Deere Landscapes acquires Overbrook Nursery

John Deere Landscapes, a wholesale distributor of landscape and irrigation supplies, has acquired Overbrook Nursery in Round Hill, VA.

The new John Deere Landscapes branch will feature a complete selection of nursery stock on the seven-acre facility, along with irrigation equipment and landscape supplies, including seed, sod, fertilizer and more.

John Deere Landscapes now has a total of seven branches throughout Virginia: Chantilly, Chesapeake, Midlothian, Newport News, Norfolk, Round Hill and Springfield.

"The Overbrook acquisition is a major step forward in our strategic plan to provide landscape and irrigation professionals with an extensive selection of installation supplies," says Phil Kerchner, Regional Vice President for John Deere Landscapes. "Contractors will find everything they need — from nursery stock to soil amendments, grass seed, fertilizer, pavers and tools to irrigation equipment, landscape lighting and more."

"The Round Hill location is well-positioned to serve the expanding Washington, D.C. market, and key Overbrook staff members will remain on board," Kerchner adds.

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# ValleyCrest acquires The Impact Group

**CALABASAS, CA** — ValleyCrest Companies, the nation's largest privately held landscape services firm, has acquired The Impact Group, a landscape maintenance company headquartered in Delray Beach, FL.

The acquisition is aimed at strengthening ValleyCrest's existing southeast Florida operations and landscape services capabilities in Dade, Broward and Palm Beach counties.

"We share a common commitment to responsive customer service and a similar approach to delivering quality landscape maintenance," says Richard Sperber, President of ValleyCrest. "As a national company, we bring technical expertise, resources and depth of experi-

ence to an already outstanding organization."

Co-founded by Ray Keenan, President, in 1990, The Impact Group has expertise in developing landscape maintenance solutions for a range of commercial customers including property management companies, office parks and homeowner associations.

Under terms of the agreement, The Impact Group will operate as ValleyCrest Landscape Maintenance. Keenan and Impact Group Vice President Bob DeFrain will assume responsibility as ValleyCrest vice presidents and oversee the company's

landscape maintenance operations in Delray Beach, Miami, Ft. Lauderdale, and West Palm Beach.

"Although the landscape maintenance industry is still fragmented following the roll-up activities of the late '90s, we believe the opportunities for strategic acquisitions remain strong," adds Sperber.



(L to R) Greg Pieschala, EVP, ValleyCrest Companies; Roger Zino, President, ValleyCrest Landscape Maintenance; Bob DeFrain, VP, The Impact Group; Richard Sperber, President, ValleyCrest Companies; Ray Keenan, co-founder, The Impact Group.



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## SIMA Symposium set for June 12-14

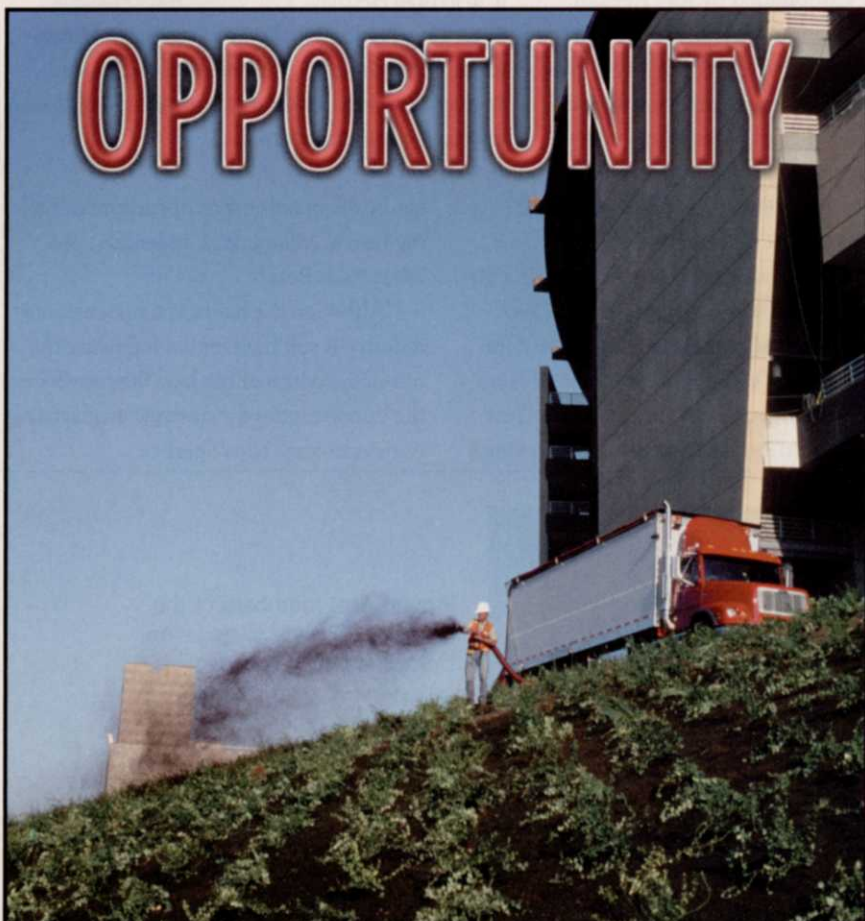
**BUFFALO, NY** — The Sixth Annual Snow and Ice Symposium unfolds in the Buffalo Convention Center here June 12 to 14. If you're in the snow and ice management

business, this will be the place to see the latest equipment, network with fellow contractors and hear some of the industry's most knowledgeable owners and consultants.

The following are some of the show's presenters:

- ▶ **Joseph Giambra**, Commissioner of Public Works, Parks and Streets for the City of Buffalo: Buffalo's Snow Fighting Plan
- ▶ **Gerald Krueger**, Ph.D., CPE, Krueger Ergonomics Consultants: Strategies to Manage Operator Fatigue
- ▶ **Atty. Robert Kennaley**, McLaughlin & Associates, Toronto: Winter Maintenance Contracts and Managing the Risk of the Slip and Fall
- ▶ **Rick Winnestaffer**, CLP, CSP, WinnScapes, Inc., Columbus, OH: Plow Your Profits into Real Estate
- ▶ **Ed Laflamme**, Grass Roots Consulting, Inc., Huntington, CT: Proven Sales Techniques
- ▶ **Nick DiBenedetto**, ND Landscaping, Topsfield, MA: An "Ideal Modeling" System to Boost Snow Profits
- ▶ **Peggy Allin**, CSP, VP of Operations, Allin Companies, Erie, PA: Dispatching Made Easy
- ▶ **Judith Guido**, KehoeGuido Co., Laguna Niguel, CA: Strategic Planning Essentials
- ▶ **Jeff Tovar**, CSP, President, and **Rick Lenth**, CSP, VP of Administration, Tovar's Snowplowing, Inc., Elgin, IL: Job Costing: Control Your Cos
- ▶ **David Tucker**, President of CLIP-Sensible Software, Inc., Ijamsville, NJ: Make Systems Work

For more information or to register, call SIMA at 814/835-3577 or visit the Web site [www.sima.org](http://www.sima.org).



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### Correction

In last month's article, "Seed trade keeps innovating," Seed Research of Oregon's Showcase Kentucky bluegrass variety was mistakenly listed as a Patten Seed Co. variety. Also, SRO's SR 9554 variety was called "Providence." This was inaccurate as well.