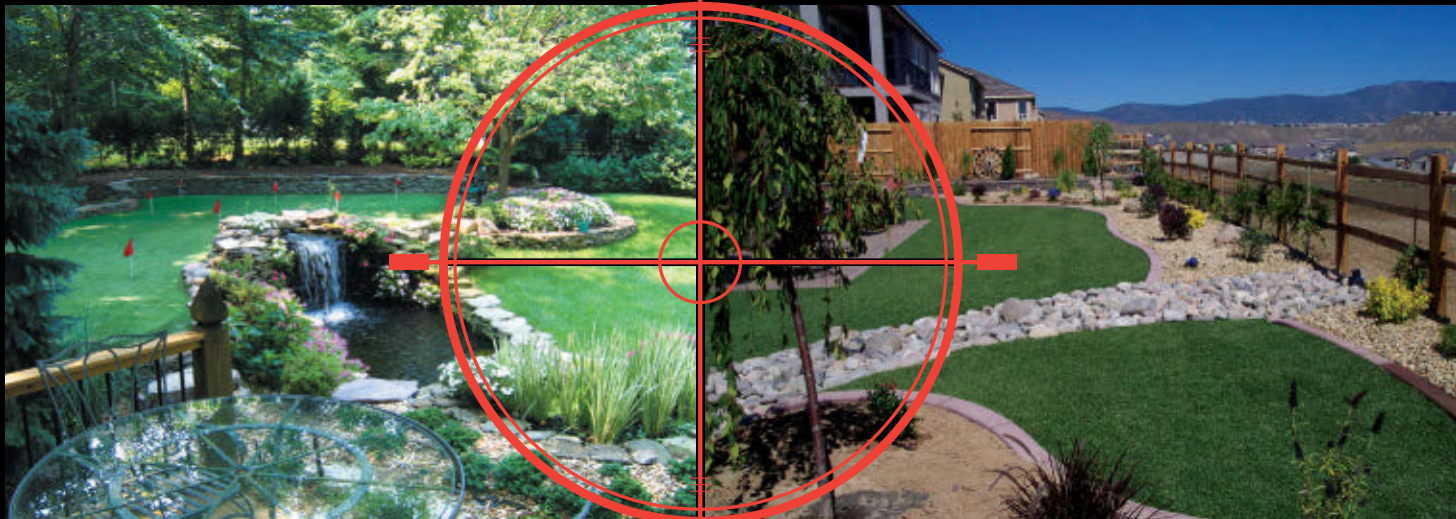


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BEST PRACTICES

BRUCE WILSON

The author is a partner with the Wilson-Oyler Group consultancy. Visit www.wilson-oyler.com.

Load up on cost-savings in 2010

In current market conditions, where low prices dominate the landscape, contractors must look for more meaningful ways to cut costs — often just so they can profit at lower price points.

The most-common way to accomplish this involves saving labor by cutting hours. While this *can* help in many cases, how much can you cut before you jeopardize the quality of your work and lose customer trust? It all depends on what you cut and how.

You must look closely at every aspect of your organization to load up on smart cost-saving strategies in 2010. Here are four money-saving suggestions:

1. Re-examine your pay rates. Prior to the recession, labor was in short supply and some felt forced to overpay to get good people (and even then, some of their hires were not that good). Are you paying too much, given today's vast labor pool, and your likely recent loss of revenues and margins?

2. Closely weigh the cost of personal use of company vehicles. This has long been a perk in the Green Industry. But that is rapidly changing. Many employers are cutting back on this practice not only because of added fuel costs and vehicle wear-and-tear, but also because of related liability exposure. Some now limit the taking home of company vehicles to employees on-call. Others place mileage limits — a fixed number of allowable commute miles, with employees paying for excess miles driven. And some have eliminated the perk entirely.

3. Look at your "sacred cows." Most organizations employ people who have not grown with the business. Nevertheless, somehow they have long been "protected" as loyal employees. These individuals typically are overpaid, yet under perform and erode the morale of your highly productive employees. Now is a good time to conduct a systemic purge.

4. Review your administrative processes. First identify processes essential to your business, such as billing and paying invoices and payroll. Then identify and scrutinize all processes (and steps within each process) that are *not* essential. Separate the wheat from the chaff and reduce administrative staff without hurting your business. In some companies, for example, a great deal of time is spent chasing down and verifying paperwork from field employees lax in turning in accurate, timely information. If you clamp down on these field employees, you can eliminate several hours of weekly administrative work.

There are potentially endless opportunities to reduce costs in most companies. It just takes discipline and a willingness to make some difficult decisions. These are tough times that require you re-examine and tighten all aspects of your operation.

Most employees understand the need to embrace change to grow. Doing so helps firms not only survive today's turbulent business climate, but also will lead to higher profits, and added job security and career opportunities, in the better times waiting just around the corner.



Allowing personal use of company vehicles is a perk on the decline.

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PROJECT PORTFOLIO

A SCRAPBOOK OF DESIGN/BUILD OVERHAULS

Tranquil terraces

THE MISSION

Create a property-wide oasis, from top to bottom, for an upscale residential development in the Arizona desert.

ISS Grounds Control acquired the multi-million dollar contract for the then-newly constructed Optima at Camelview in November 2005, and started working with developer David Hovey and landscape architecture designer, Floor Associates, to create a distinctive, soothing outdoor atmosphere for the 14-acre sanctuary — including more than 700 individually designed private terraces and a green roof that spans a majority of the 11-building community.

The project is considered to be the “first multi-level, mixed-use oasis of green roof terraces in Arizona,” notes Dan Scholl, who with Thom Landauer led the design for ISS Grounds Control’s Phoenix branch.

The ISS Grounds Control team truly had to think outside the box when designing and installing landscape for the green roof — all while considering and including the intertwining positions of each building.

“This is the most challenging landscape project we’ve ever done,” admits Todd Huston, general manager of the Phoenix branch.

By adapting to the challenges and design changes, however, ISS Grounds Control was able to tackle each individual assignment openly, while maintaining ingenuity, sustainability and overall residential privacy.



THE WORK

1 | THE THEORY IN PRACTICE.

The overall project is based on line of sight, leaping from unit to unit, utilizing tens of thousands of native and semi-native plant and tree materials.

2 | STEADY FLOW. “On the ground level, the flow of vibrant green, colorful shrubs and groundcover steer the eye up through native trees, which then lead to a multitude of color of each terrace to the roof,” says Dan Scholl of ISS Grounds Control.



continued on page 36 >>



GOLF



LAWN



NURSERY



ORNAMENTAL



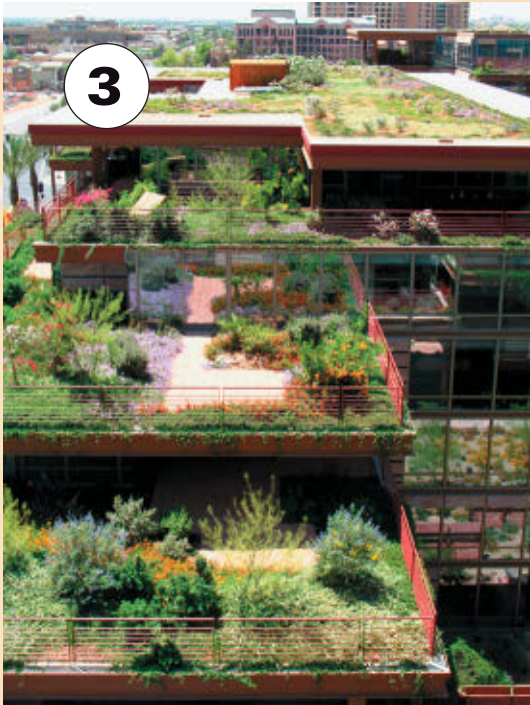
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P R O V E N S O L U T I O N S

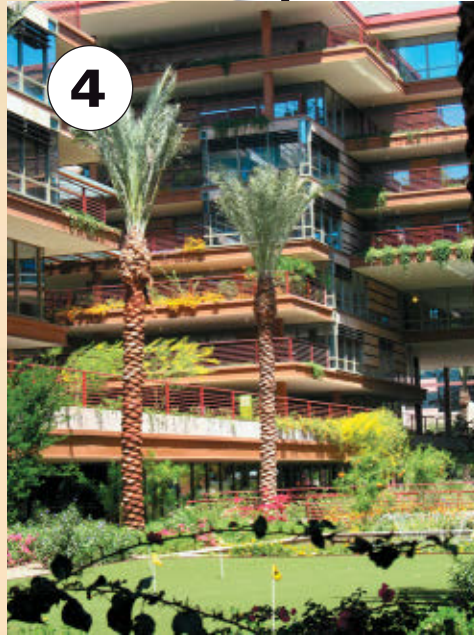


« continued from page 34

THE WORK

3 | IT ALL STACKS UP ... Or down, as this view from the top of Building 10 can attest.

4 | DESERT? WHAT DESERT? The main courtyard features both a miniature golf course and cascading residential terraces.



5 | ONE SYSTEM DOES IT ALL. The entire grounds are watered by a computer-generated, two-wire irrigation controller, including a fertigation system carefully supplying calculated amounts of water and nutrients to the abundant amounts of plant material.

6 | RIGHT, FROM THE START. This view showcases where the development's main sales office is located. Palm trees and colorful plantings give potential clients a preview of the lush landscape throughout the property.



ISS Grounds Control was established in 1974 as a commercial landscape maintenance firm in San Antonio, TX. It has grown throughout the Southwest to include operations in California and Arizona. The company is a subsidiary of ISS Facility Services, which provides janitorial, landscaping, support, security and integrated facility services. ISS Facility Services recently was named the fifth-largest private employer in the world by Dun & Bradstreet. This particular installation garnered a recent Environmental Improvement Grand Award from the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). For more information, visit GroundsControl.com.

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PROBLEMSOLVER

LANDSCAPE TROUBLESHOOTING TIPS » BY H. BRUCE HELLERICK



PROBLEM

I passed these trees on a residential lawn awhile back. I parked my car and took a closer look. The homeowner said he had the offending trees pruned because they were growing too tall and he did not want them to “fall over.” I asked,

“Are you happy with the result? Would you do it again?” He replied they seemed thin. He also said he would wait and see how much they grew before possibly pruning them again.



SOLUTION

“Tree topping” — is a common practice in some parts of the country. It’s usually performed by those uneducated about proper arborist or pruning practices.

Education is the best way to stop tree topping. Explain your stance in letters to the editor. Talk to homeowners who have had their trees topped to find out who did the work. Provide that company with pruning tips.

Here are links to three groups that can provide more information on tree care-related questions:

- › **National Arbor Day Foundation:** ArborDay.org
- › **Plant Amnesty:** PlantAmnesty.org
- › **International Society of Arboriculture:** ISA-Arbor.com

Every day you see horticultural problems. Sometimes the solution is obvious, but others are much more difficult to solve. Brickman Group Senior Horticulture Specialist H. Bruce Hellerick tackles these issues in Problem Solver. He can be reached at Hellerick@BrickmanGroup.com.

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IT'S GOT MOVES

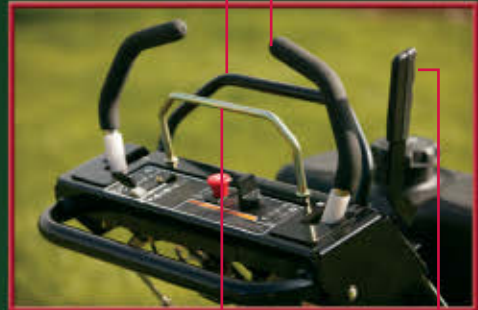
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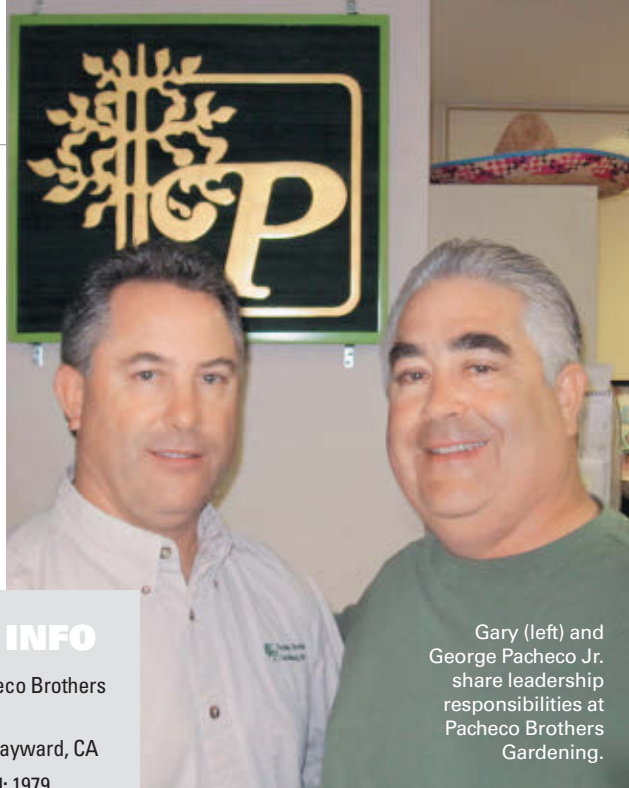
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ACUTABOVE

GREEN INDUSTRY MAINTENANCE LEADERS » BY DAN JACOBS

George and Gary Pacheco are celebrating their 30th and most challenging year in business. Based in Hayward, CA, **Pacheco Brothers Gardening** has been adjusting to extreme changes in the weather — and the economy. President and CEO **George Pacheco Jr.** shares how their organization is dealing with these troubled times.



Gary (left) and George Pacheco Jr. share leadership responsibilities at Pacheco Brothers Gardening.

TOP TRENDS

» **The move to maintenance.** Everybody in landscape construction is headed toward maintenance. Companies that have 20, 30 years in business and did more construction are moving into maintenance, or they're closing their doors. They find it hard to compete against the big guys. Some have had it. They've saved money, and they're starting to get out of the business.

» **Decreased spending.** Cities aren't spending money because they don't have it to spend. They had to cut back somewhere. They've reduced services or they're not doing extras. More cities are going out to bid. I've re-earned their business, but at a lower rate, so our margin isn't nearly as good. We've had to take 10% to 20% off our pricing just to keep the business. Bottom line, it hurts. You've got to do more volume, and most people don't like to do volume work. It's not worth it. I've never seen it be as bad as it is.

TOP OBSTACLES

» **The local economy.** In California, we were hit with two things: drought and, like everybody in the nation, the economic conditions. The housing market in California has seen a major crunch.

» **Increased competition.** We usually see bids from companies within a 15- to 20-mile radius. Now we're seeing companies from 50 to 100 miles out. If they get a big enough job, they'll put a sub-yard in. There's double, triple the competition now.

TOP OPPORTUNITIES

» **Increase marketing.** We've been very proactive on the marketing end — everything from ads in the local newspaper to updat-

INSIDE INFO

Company: Pacheco Brothers Gardening

Headquarters: Hayward, CA

Year established: 1979

Employees: 125 (approximate)

Annual revenue: \$9 million

Keys to being a Maintenance Leader: Be a leader in the community you reside in. I'm very active in our city government. I'm very active in the local hospital and the chamber of commerce. Be there to help out; back up your community. Do anything they need. We've coached our staff to think and act like community ambassadors.

ing our Web site to investing in search engine optimization to raise our company's online ranking and recognition.

» **Use downtime to improve education.** You have to be up on the certifications — not be just an arborist, but also become water-audit certified and green-certified. We try to emphasize our irrigation certification and what our techs offer — having them conduct water audits and be very proactive with client irrigation systems, for example.

» **Offer flexibility.** When a city's mower goes down, instead of going to the local dealer to fix the mower, we make sure they know they can

call us. At a moment's notice, we can serve as their backup. Most of the cities in the Bay Area know we have extra mowers. They call us and we finish their half-done jobs. It's really worked well for us.

» **Take advantage of changes.** We recently branched out into synthetic sports field cleaning after studying the segment. A lot of cities and schools have three or four synthetic fields. Typically, no one is cleaning those. We believe new regulations are coming that will make it mandatory to clean synthetic sports fields once or twice annually and apply solutions that will protect the artificial turf and players against bacteria. The NCAA and the NFL require it, but it has not hit the high school market yet. It's like deep-cleaning a carpet. We provide synthetic turf cleaning and a bacterial spray that protects against staph infections.

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