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[ CASE STUDIES ON GROWTH ]

# Sharpening the saw

An in-depth self-examination led to better business at Lawn Doctor. BY **LINDSEY GETZ**

SCOTT FRITH, VICE president — marketing and franchise development for Lawn Doctor, headquartered in Holmdel, NJ, believes the economic situation actually strengthened the company. “It caused us to take a really close look at our business, our team and our processes to look at what opportunities are out there,” he says. “Stephen Covey calls it ‘sharpening the saw,’ so you can cut better, and that’s just what we’ve done. We conducted an in-depth self-examination that’s led to ways we can build a better business.” At press time, sales were approaching 15% growth over last year.

How they grew involved a variety of contributing factors, including the formation of committees focused on specific functional areas in the business, bringing franchisees to the table so their voices could be heard. “They help us drive our strategies,” Frith says. “We want to keep them involved in decisions.”

Implementing more technology was also a key growth factor that allowed the company to drive more marketing and some service and sales efficiencies. “Having more efficient sys-

tems is important,” Frith says. “For instance, having GPS routing and mobile technologies enables us to check in on jobs easier and sync up with software in the office.”

And like many other companies, Frith also says the economic situation has made customer retention more important than ever. As a result, the company has really focused on providing better customer service. “We’ve always put the customer at the center, but I do think when you’re growing at a certain rate you’re always looking for the next customer. You don’t forget the existing customer, but maybe you don’t do everything you really should to retain them and create that referral base. So we’ve really started focusing our efforts on what we need to do to deliver on the service expectations of all of our customers.”

For Lawn Doctor, the economic situation has also created a unique opportunity Frith believes will bring future franchise growth — the fact that so many green industry vets are out of work but still love the industry. “There are a lot of quality green industry people out there who just don’t see a light at the end of the tunnel in their state of unemployment,” he says. “We believe a future trend for us will be hearing from people who’ve lost jobs in the Green Industry who come to a point where they need to make a move and want to do it on their own but still go with a brand they know and trust.

We’ve had so much interest already.”

As a result, the company now offers a green discount for industry vets. If applicants qualify as having Green Industry experience, they’ll get \$12,500 off of the initial startup fee. The company is also now financing half of the total investment for all new franchisees. “There are so many people out there who are responsible and hardworking, and did everything right; they just fell victim to the times,” Frith says. “We believe in our brand and the people in this industry, so if they’re joining our brand, we want to help them out.” **LM**

## GROWTH PROFILE

Lawn Doctor  
Holmdel, N.J.  
2010 Growth: 15%



Scott Frith

*GETZ is a freelancer with experience covering the landscape industry.*



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[ CASE STUDIES ON GROWTH ]

# Making dad and

Steven Jomides is on track to turn a \$15,000 starter loan from his dad into a \$10 million-plus business by 2013 — the 25th anniversary of Lawns By Yorkshire.

BY **MARTY WHITFORD**  
EDITORIAL DIRECTOR

STEVEN JOMIDES NEVER had the opportunity to fully repay the \$15,000 his father loaned him in 1988 to found Lawns By Yorkshire.

“I made one or two small payments to Dad in '88, but later that year he died of lung cancer at age 56,” shares Jomides, a black belt in Tae Kwon Do, as he fights back tears. “Mom died two years later, at 53, of brain cancer. I was orphaned at 27. I grew up in a hurry.”

Today, the 48-year-old Jomides says he honors his parents daily by placing family first, while working hard to grow his dad's \$15,000 loan into a \$10 million-plus business by



Steven Jomides

### GROWTH PROFILE

Lawns By Yorkshire  
Westwood, NJ

**2010 Growth:**  
10%-15%

# mom proud

2013 — the 25th anniversary of the founding of Lawns By Yorkshire.

## Seed of hope

Little did Jomides or his parents know then, but that \$15,000 starter loan would represent the seed of hope for a 25-year-old only child about to lose both parents.

“Looking back, it’s very fitting I named the business Lawns By Yorkshire,” Jomides notes. “My parents absolutely loved, and for years bred, Yorkshire terriers. I’m not a small-dog guy, but it’s never been just about me. This business is as much Dad’s and Mom’s as it is mine and my associates.”

Jomides is a self-purported graduate of “The Green School of Hard Knocks.”

“When I was 17, I made \$3 per hour mowing lawns and picking weeds for a friend,” Jomides reminisces. “I spent most of my daily earnings on breakfast and lunch. That was Lesson No. 1: Control expenditures now; rewards come later.”

Three years later, Jomides received a reward: a 33% bump in pay when he went to work for another landscape contractor.

“I earned \$4 per hour — but, again, it was very hard and humbling work,” Jomides notes. “Tasked with transporting crushed blue landscape stone up a steep hill, I lasted only one week on that grueling job.

“But I learned another critical business lesson that week: The sizable gap between labor and material costs and project pricing — the ‘net’ — really caught my eye, and eventually my heart and my parents’ faith,” Jomides adds. “The seed to start my own landscape business was planted

that week, with that job loss. Five years later, with help from Dad and Mom, I struck out on my own.”

## No small dog

After attending his father’s funeral, Jomides returned to work that afternoon. And, for the most part, he hasn’t looked back since.

“I only have two regrets: 1) That my parents never met my beautiful bride of 16 years, Andrea, and our children, Zac and Noa; and 2) That Dad and Mom never saw what became of their \$15,000 — how their little Yorkshire has grown into a pretty big dog.”

Lawns By Yorkshire has grown its annual revenue two hundredfold — from about \$40,000 in sales in 1988 to a projected \$8 million this year. The company’s operations, meanwhile, have expanded from one small home office to its Westwood, NJ, headquarters plus three satellite locations.

The company’s “Green Team” provides landscape and tree installation and maintenance; lawn, plant and shrub care; integrated pest management; design/build services; erosion control; and irrigation and storm water management solutions. The Green team accounts for half of the company’s employee roster, yet typically generates about two-thirds of the business’ annual sales.

Lawns By Yorkshire’s “White Team” comprises about 250 associates providing snow and ice management services. With an arsenal of 40 trucks, 30 plows, 75 snowblowers, 15 salt spreaders and more than 40 skid steers with plow attachments, the White Team is tethered to headquarters and one

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another via smart phones, a system of controlled circuit TV cameras and GPS devices. "Technology helps us ensure safety and efficiency in even the most brutal of Northeast storms," Jomides adds.

Lawns By Yorkshire serves an array of clients — from homeowner associations, multi-family dwellings and senior-living facilities to hotels, restaurants and retail/shopping centers, to school and corporate cam-

pus to municipalities and industrial complexes — throughout New Jersey and New York.

"How do we grow every year? We work our butts off to bring in and keep business," Jomides says. "Sometimes,

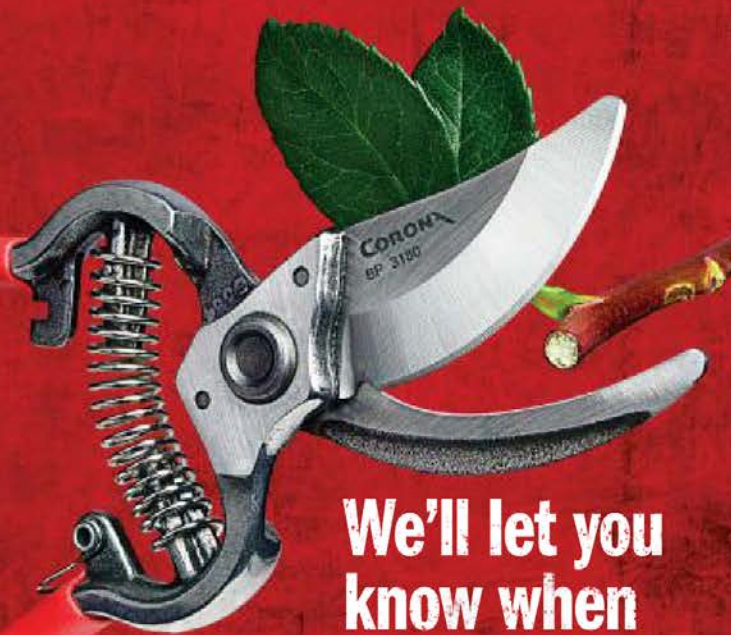
## NOTHING BUT NETS

Jomides tipped off 2010 by forging a co-branding business development deal with the NBA's New Jersey Nets. The integrated marketing alliance includes:

- ▶ A "Greenest Fan" contest, in which Nets enthusiasts craft essays offering environmentally sound solutions to common problems, with winners awarded environmental prizes on Nets' "Green Nights." Jomides and the Nets have taken their green game on the road, educating grade-schoolers — tomorrow's leaders — on the importance of environmental stewardship and the ecological and health benefits of plants.
- ▶ The installation of a Lawns By Yorkshire Putting Green just outside The Courtside Club at The Prudential Center where the Nets currently play — offering fans another opportunity to win prizes.
- ▶ Lawns By Yorkshire serving as the presenting sponsor of the Nets' "Metropolitan Madness Basketball Challenge," an annual five-on-five tournament in which associates from 64 major companies compete in March at PNY Center, the Nets' practice facility in East Rutherford, NJ.
- ▶ The landscape business also is the presenting sponsor of "Football Night,"



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our industry forgets we need to keep our customers happy to keep them. Other times, we forget we need to keep selling to keep growing. We need to do both very well to survive and thrive in this business.”

### Giving back

Jomides says he feels a strong tug to give back to the Green Industry, which has given him, his family and his family of associates so much. That’s why he shares his time and leadership

talents with the New Jersey Landscape Contractors Association (NJLCA) and the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET).

“Steven’s dedication to the Green Industry, network of industry profes-

a gridiron-themed evening including a chance for fans to don football uniforms and have their photos taken with Nets Dancers, as well as to participate at halftime in an on-court football skills competition. The winner receives a sustainable landscape consultation and maintenance facelift compliments of Lawns By Yorkshire.

➤ A private suite located in The Platinum Lounge of The Prudential Center serves as a networking opportunity for Jomides, other Nets sponsors and premium floor-seat season ticketholders.

➤ Lawns By Yorkshire also receives in-arena signage, advertising space on [www.njnets.com](http://www.njnets.com), and a radio ad and feature during each Nets’ radio broadcast.

“Co-branding with a major sports brand like the Nets is the opportunity of a lifetime for us,” Jomides says. “Because of these new, high-level marketing and networking opportunities, we’ve landed key projects such as maintaining the landscape surrounding the Nets’ practice facility, as well as Vonage’s existing and PNY’s future headquarters — and we’re just getting started.” — *MW*

Steven Jomides (left) with Brett Yormark CEO of Nets Basketball and President and CEO Brooklyn Sports & Entertainment



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sionals and addictive enthusiasm has been a welcomed addition to NJLCA's Board of Directors," says NJLCA President Jody Shilan.

Jomides also is an active member of PLANET, helping to drive mem-



Jomides' management team (From left): Chris Hricik, Burke Hammonds, Jomides, Fidel Castro and Mark Boggio. Left, employee Noe Garcia.



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bership in the national association as well as serving on its Executive Forum Committee.

"We have an excellent group of core managers at Lawns By Yorkshire, which affords me the peace of mind needed to leave base camp and give back more to our industry," Jomides notes. "We're about halfway up Mount Everest. As we close in on the summit, I'll turn over more to our talented management team and give back more to the industry."

After one of his rare looks in the rearview mirror, Jomides earlier this year decided to further honor his parents while giving back to the industry.

Jomides and Judy Guido, his chief marketing officer, are working closely with PLANET staff to establish an annual scholarship in the names of Jomides' parents, Morton and Sandra. The goal is to each year award one landscape/horticulture student \$1,000 for his or her education as part of the planned \$25,000 scholarship endowment.

"This annual PLANET scholarship honoring Dad and Mom will be around long after I'm gone," Jomides says, smiling. "I wasn't afforded the time to pay back my father during his short stay here, but I can repay Dad and Mom by paying it forward." **LM**



[ CASE STUDIES ON GROWTH ]

# Retain to gain

BEN COLLINSWORTH, CEO of Native Land Design in Cedar Park, TX, says his key to success this year was simple — he didn't try to reinvent the wheel.

"While many others in our market and industry are trying to add revenue in a bad economy, we have tried to get better operationally in our business and give our current customers more attention and better customer service," Collinsworth says. "We want to spend our time trying to retain our current clients instead of hitting the streets trying to add a lot of new people to the mix."

Focusing primarily inward on existing clients has led to organic growth for the company. In fact, despite the down economy, Native Land Design is looking at bringing in a little more than \$9.2 million this year in revenue. Last year, they brought in \$7.6 million. And for the past three years, Native Land Design has made the *Inc.* magazine list of the Fastest Growing Private Companies in America with 108.5% growth from 2005 to 2008.

In Cedar Park, TX, people are starting to spend money again, Collinsworth says, and that's allowed his company, which is driven by 90% commercial work, to grow without having to pick up a ton of new clientele. But Collinsworth did pick up a few big jobs this year, which also helped growth. The economy has actually created a unique situation in which Native Land

## Focusing on existing customers brought organic growth to Native Land Design. BY LINDSEY GETZ

Design has had the opportunity to get some work that was previously unavailable. "Jobs went up for bid that had been tied up with one landscape business for years," he explains. "There were companies out there that had their budgets cut and they had to shop around for a lower price. That has allowed a business like ours to secure projects that previously weren't even available for bid. So, in some ways, the economic situation has actually helped us."

While the economy allowed Collinsworth to get some new work, it also led to his biggest challenge to overcome. As a relatively young company, Native Land Design found it difficult to find the funds they needed from local bankers. Collinsworth overcame this by looking for the right lending opportunities out of state.

"We actually had to look nationally," he says, "to make sure the funding was available to finance the equipment we needed for growth."

Operationally, growth has also required more equipment and labor, Collinsworth points out. The latter is another area where the economic situation has actually helped. "Because the construction industry was so hard hit by the economy, there's some good talent that's readily available right now," he says.

While the company has made some pretty big strides in growth, Collinsworth says he's looking to be conservative in his plans for continued growth. In the past, the company grew too quickly — going from a \$4 million business to a \$10 million one in just two years — and that almost put them out of business. "We're anticipating 7% to 10% growth for next year and think that's a comfortable, conservative number," he says. "There are a lot of clients who cut back services, and we're hoping they'll start spending even more next year and add some of those services back. So we're looking at growing again without having to pick up a lot of new clients." **LM**

### GROWTH PROFILE

Native Land Design  
Cedar Park, TX  
**2010 Growth:** 21%



Ben Collinsworth

GETZ is a freelancer with experience covering landscaping.

[ CASE STUDIES ON GROWTH ]

# Hire slow, grow fast

People are the front-line of growth at Ryan Lawn & Tree. BY LINDSEY GETZ



Larry Ryan

## GROWTH PROFILE

Ryan Lawn & Tree  
Overland, KS

**2010 Growth:** Between 10% and 14%

LARRY RYAN, PRESIDENT of Ryan Lawn & Tree in Overland, KS, believes the quality of his company's growth has come from the quality of the people he hires — and that's an area where

the economy has actually helped his business. "A lot of the people who would normally go into the golf course industry are coming to us," he says. "That industry is overbuilt and currently depressed. We also get a lot of top quality people straight out of the local universities who are anxious for a job."

Ryan looks at 20 resumes for every one person he hires, and his focus on seeking out the best people is what has grown the company, despite these tough times. He's expecting between 10% and 14% growth.

Irrigation (which accounts for about 10% of services offered) has been one of the company's strongest

growth areas considering the region is coming off of two very wet years where there was little demand. "A dry season will market our service," he says. "In 2011, we again expect irrigation to be one of our strongest growth areas." The company also does 55% turf work and 35% forestry, and services mostly (80%) residential customers.

In terms of marketing, Ryan says it's the top-notch employees that best market his company. Word-of-mouth is still the company's No. 1 way of corraling new business, and Ryan says having hard-working, uniformed employees out in the field everyday has also helped rope in new jobs. In addition, he also recently redesigned his website and is looking to generate more of a web presence for the business. "We've almost completely done away with the Yellow Pages," says Ryan. "We find them very limiting."

In addition to quality employees and a growing web presence, Ryan says his company's focus on the customer is probably what aided growth the most. The company is in regular communication with all of its customers. "It's important to have a staff that will take the initiative to call people — and not just the top people but all of the customers," he emphasizes. "We just had a scenario where someone cancelled our pruning services to go

with someone that was \$200 cheaper. The employee called them up and left a message thanking them for their business and just putting it out there how important pruning is and how critical it is that they are using a reputable company that will do it right. Within an hour the customer called back and said they'd rather have us do the job right than save a little money."

Ryan makes a special effort to really focus on the tough customers too, and that's ultimately helped with customer retention. In this economy every customer counts. "It's too easy to walk away from that really tough or nasty client, but hanging in longer teaches us to take better care of all our customers," he adds. "Our customer service is the number one reason we grew this year. We don't easily give up on any customer." **LMI**

GETZ is a freelancer with experience covering landscaping.