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## Sowing the seeds of history

Three pioneering companies share *LM*'s rich history and offer their views about where the industry is headed.

BY DAN JACOBS, RON HALL AND BETH GERACI

**LM MARKET MATCH** We've made your life a little easier by supplying icons that direct you to stories targeting your core business.

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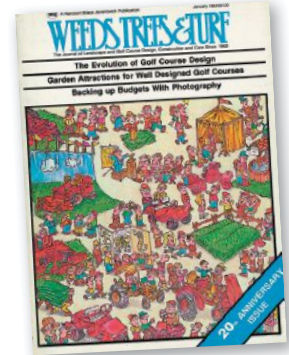
**ON THE COVER** Photo courtesy of Bartlett Tree Experts ; background photo by iStock International Inc.



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**OUR MISSION:** *Landscape Management* — the leading information resource for lawn care, landscape maintenance, design/build and irrigation contractors — empowers Green Industry professionals to learn from their peers and our exclusive business intelligence from the *only* experienced editorial team in the market. Serving as the industry conscience for 50 years, we not only report on but also help shape news, views, trends and solutions.



## Showing a little gray hair

**M**y, how the time flies. With this issue, *Landscape Management* magazine begins its 50th year in publishing. That's right, we're just starting to show a touch of gray, which gives us that experienced, distinguished look.

The magazine that evolved into *Landscape Management* began life in July 1962 as *Weeds and Turf*, a supplement to *Pest Control* (now *Pest Management Professional*) magazine.

It's funny how protective editors get about the magazines for which they work. In many ways we think of them like our children. We take care of them — give them everything they need to survive. On occasion we make mistakes, but for the most part we're proud caretakers, boasting of our triumphs and milestones. And 50 years is a heck of a milestone.

*Landscape Management* has been around longer than any publication in the industry, as well as many of its current employees. Yet, that institutional memory is an invaluable asset. We have a deep, rich history, but don't let that touch of gray fool you. We're not resting on our laurels. Here are just a few of the "firsts" we've brought to Green Industry publishing:

› *LM* was the first magazine in the industry to publish "State of the Industry" reports.

› *LM* was the first magazine in the industry to publish lists of the 100 largest landscape & lawn care companies (the *LM100* being the first ever, now expanded to the *LM150*).

› *LM* is the sole producer of the popular and branded "Pocket Guides" — Turfgrass Seeds, Herbicides, Fungicides, Insecticides, etc.

› *LM* was the first magazine in the industry to conduct a "Grassroots Summit" with the participation of nationally recognized industry experts on issues relating to professional lawn care.

› *LM* is the only magazine serving the professional Green Industry chosen as a finalist for a Crain Award, trade publishing's equivalent of a Pulitzer.

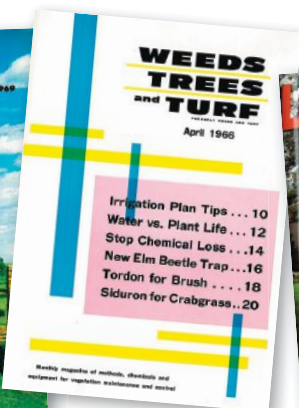
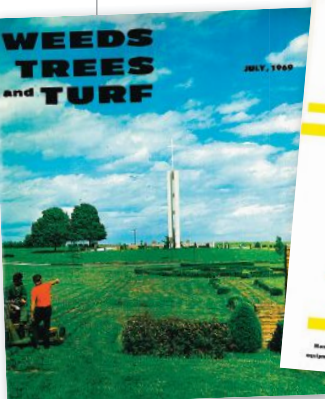
› With its award-winning coverage of immigration and its annual "Water Wise" landscape irrigation series, *LM* editors provide the most in-depth reporting of key issues confronting the Green Industry.

The wonderful thing about publishing is that even with our longevity, we've lost none of the vibrancy, relevancy or the excitement that make this magazine the most award-winning publication in the industry.

With that combination of excitement and experience, we're looking to the next 50 years — not just for *LM*, but for the Green Industry.

To get a sense of where the coming decades will take us, we talk with a few companies who've seen just about everything. Bartlett Tree Experts has survived more than a century in business. While Grasshopper Lawns hasn't been around quite as long, the company sports its fair share of gray hair. Barnes Nursery has been reinventing itself for more than six decades.

See what they have to say about where we're headed as an industry with our cover story "Sowing the seeds of history," beginning on page 10.





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# PROGRESS



## In your hands

**T**ighter rules and regulations in the Green Industry have changed the field's landscape in more ways than one. And businesspeople in every sector of the profession are feeling the crunch.

Regulations "are more stringent than they were 10, 15 years ago, and that's the nature of the beast," said Tom Delaney, director of government affairs for the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET). "Regulations are always going to increase. They're always going to be more restrictive. And that's the nature of regulating and regulators."

As dark as it sounds, new rules and regulations aren't necessarily a bad thing, said John Farner, federal affairs director for the Irrigation Association (IA). On the irrigation side, "professional contractors are putting a lot more thought into what is planted into a landscape and how that landscape is irrigated...what the design is like, and how that design is used.

"That's the most noticeable change that I've seen so far," he continued. "A lot of the contractors and manufacturers I've talked to on the irrigation side are using this as a business opportunity."

Not only that, he said, they're embracing the challenge to diversify their businesses and redefine themselves in the face of tighter municipal, state and federal mandates.

Farner said two predominant issues are driving the irrigation industry today: water quantity and water quality. Water quantity is a concern in arid states west of the Mississippi River. The West's water availability — or lack thereof — "is dictating what plant material is being installed and what kind of water is being used to irrigate the landscape," among

## New regulations have made work harder for Green Industry pros, and change won't happen on its own.

other things, Farner said.

Out East, lawmakers are zeroed in on reducing runoff into the Chesapeake Bay watershed. "Look, we don't want any impurities being runoff into the Chesapeake Bay," Farner said. "Our industry is being looked at...but there's no one size fits all solution when it comes to the irrigation profession. It needs to be based on the local environment, the locality. When we're faced with one size fits all, it really doesn't work."

And Bay runoff isn't only affecting irrigators; it's also creating tighter fertilizer regulations for landscapers, who now are restricted on when they can fertilize, what kind of fertilizers they can use, and how much of them.

"We are seeing very prescriptive and restrictive local ordinances covering pesticide and fertilizer use generally, and as part of water quality concerns," said Aaron Hobbs, president of Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE). Hobbs said the Green Industry should be most concerned about "the absence of science and recognition of product benefits in such policies, and the potential for local and state enforcement targeting professionals."

Some states have cut back on fertilizing by up to several weeks, Delaney said.

And that's just the start for the landscape industry. The EPA's WaterSense program, aimed at conserving water, is "killing the turfgrass and landscape industries," Delaney asserted. "It will cut

back on the amount of turfgrass that's out there. And as they cut back on the amount of turfgrass, it has a rippling effect. The fertilizer industry will sell less fertilizer. The turfgrass companies will sell less seed."

But the debate over immigration and H-2B is shaking up the landscape business as much as anything, he said.

If landscape companies think it's expensive to participate in the program now, he said, just wait until Jan. 1, when "they're going to have to pay \$2.60 more an hour per worker," on average.

PLANET members impacted by the H-2B program can't afford to "put their head in the sand," Delaney asserted. "Some of them are afraid that if they put their name on something, they might have an inspector at the door. Otherwise, why would you not spend five minutes to get on our site and send a letter to your congressman? It takes five minutes! It's just trying to wake people up and get them to see they can have an effect and they can make a difference."

Having that dialog with lawmakers is most challenging — and most important — of all, Farner echoed.

"The number one challenge is making sure our folks are at the table when these issues are being looked at by a governing body," he said. "We need to make sure we are engaged and speaking with policy makers, a mayor, a congressman, everyone in-between. If we work with legislators, they'll respond more positively to our needs."



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## THE HALLMARK

RON HALL EDITOR-AT-LARGE

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# Is this recovery different?

**B**eing a world champion of hindsight and after some considerable reflection, I can now write at length about the housing market crash and resulting 2008 Recession. Anybody could have seen it coming, right? How about \$775,000 for a modest 3-bedroom ranch house on a canal in Cape Coral, FL.?

Yes, we looked at one, but it was way more than we could afford. Did we think the price was a tad high? Well, yes.

With that admission, let's look back at other recent economic crisis that slammed our industry. Perhaps we can tease some valuable insights from them about recovering from this latest debacle.

Some of you will recall the 1991 recession. Consumer confidence (and spending) plummeted in the face of high unemployment and worrisome inflation. All U.S. businesses suffered, including our industry. The poor state of the economy was generally blamed for George H. Bush's failed bid for a second term as President.

The go-go 1990s ended with the bursting of the "Tech Bubble." The U.S. economy was still mired in malaise in 2001 when 9/11 added a profound sense of rage and fear to the mix.

### Head-on collision

The landscape industry grew robustly after both recessions. Revenues are estimated to have climbed by more than 30% from 1991 to 2008 when the the housing market tumbled like a house of cards and the financial services industry came to a near worldwide collapse.

The homeowner refinance boom evaporated within a matter of weeks, credit dried up and consumers panicked. Many landscape companies, blithely unaware of what was coming, hit the Recession going full blast.

Again in 2011 we're slowly recovering again. (Why does each decade start so ominously?)

Remarkably, mid-year 2011 the general makeup

of our industry remains remarkably similar to what it was in 1991 and 2001. This includes its basic core of services with pretty much the same laundry list of environmental and regulatory challenges.

But, in light of the severity of the '08 economic disaster, Washington's inability to fashion a believable recovery strategy is unsettling if not criminal.

### Continuing demand

There's no question that, looking ahead, consumers will continue to appreciate their properties, including their lawns. And they'll count on professional services to keep them attractive and healthy. Turf care will remain the largest revenue producer for the industry thanks to:

- ▶ new species and cultivars of turfgrass that resist pests, require fewer chemical inputs (including synthetic fertilizers) and remain healthy and attractive with less water or by using recycled and lower-quality water;
- ▶ fuel-efficient mowers that are quieter, safer to operate and produce minimal or no emissions;
- ▶ more precise and efficient product/service delivery methods, and;
- ▶ a better overall understanding of the role and uses of turfgrass to capture and remediate runoff, and to recharge aquifers.

Beyond turfgrass, the industry will incorporate more native plants onto clients' properties, and can count on the discovery and commercial development of beautiful, new adaptive ornamentals. Terms such as nativescaping, wildscaping and birdscaping are starting to creep into the industry's language. That's great. We're environmentalists.

We will enjoy innovations in every product we use, and in every service that we provide clients, including services we have yet to imagine.

Once our nation digs out of this latest financial mess (Attention Washington: There's really no other option.), whatever we conceive in terms of outdoor services — both the familiar and the yet-to-be realized — we can achieve.

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## Offering insurance helps attract and retain employees

IF YOU HAVEN'T REVIEWED YOUR INSURANCE BENEFITS IN A WHILE, YOU MIGHT BE MISSING OUT ON SOME OF THE MOST IMPORTANT WAYS TO KEEP YOUR BUSINESS SAFE AND SOUND.

**T**HE INSURANCE LANDSCAPE is changing, says John Hodapp, CPCU, Hortica Insurance and Employee Benefits. "Businesses may qualify for tax credits that are part of the 2010 Affordable Care Act," he says. "They help employers afford group health benefits for their employees, depending on the number of employees in the company. Also, term life insurance rates have fallen, so people who haven't been in the life insurance marketplace recently may be overpaying."

**Health insurance** — Offering employees health insurance is more than a cost-effective way to attract and retain good employees, says Diane Bloemker, an employee benefits consultant with Hortica. It's also a great way to help them stay healthy, especially since employees with group insurance receive wellness benefits at no cost, also because of health care reform.

Landscape firms may find it difficult to meet the participation requirements established by health insurance companies, Hodapp says. Group plans require a certain percentage of eligible employees to enroll in the plan. Most landscape contractors hire a significant percentage of workers who don't think they need health insurance and don't want to pay for it.

"We've helped many employers implement dual-option plans," he says. Dual-option plans give employees a choice of either a basic low-cost plan or a more expensive plan that provides more robust benefits. Employees who might otherwise "opt-out" of health insurance may purchase coverage when a lower-cost alternative is available.

**Disability benefits** — Most workplace injuries are covered by workers compensation insurance. However, injuries and illnesses that are not work-related still occur. Short and long-term disability insurance covers the loss of earnings due to accidents and disabling illnesses. These policies can be funded by either employers or employees.

**Key person life insurance** — In the landscaping business, the loss of the service of a key person could hurt the business. When the key people are insured under this policy, the death benefit could provide dollars to help the business weather the storm, says Bloemker.

**Work site benefits** — "These are relatively low cost policies purchased voluntarily by employees to provide specified benefits directly to the employees," Hodapp says.

For example, employees with an accident policy who become injured receive a monetary benefit they can use in any way they choose, he says. This is in addition to workers compensation or any other insurance they have.


Employees also can buy insurance with "first occurrence benefits," Bloemker says. Policyholders are paid a lump sum benefit when they're first diagnosed with a covered major illness such as cancer.

**Life insurance** — Landscape firms also can offer their employees inexpensive group life insurance, and individual policies.

**Long-term care insurance** — Long term care insurance, funded by either employer or employees, can help protect employees' savings and investments.

"If someone has the need for a facility such as a nursing home, long term care insurance contributes toward the cost," she says. It also can cover home health care for individuals who are able to stay in their home.

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Employees say health insurance is important to them.

### WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

1. Employees say medical insurance is their most important benefit.
2. Employees should take advantage of all available wellness benefits to maintain their good health.
3. Children can now be covered on a parent's group health insurance plan until age 26.
4. Employers typically pay at least 50% of the cost of employees' health care insurance.
5. Prescription drugs account for a major portion of health insurance costs. The use of generic drugs and mail order pharmacies helps control costs.

### BENEFITS SHOPPING TIPS

**A few things employers should keep in mind when they're shopping around for an employee benefits package:**

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- Consider the importance of service after the sale. Hortica offers expert personalized service to help with billing and claims questions and helps employees get the most from their benefit packages.
- Employers who encourage wellness and healthy living are often able to reduce their health insurance costs over the long run.
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Three pioneering companies share *LM's* rich history and offer their views about where the industry is headed.

It's funny how society looks at age. Sometimes it's revered; other times it's reviled. Fortunately, as companies get on in years, they're more likely to be revered.

It's been said that wisdom, experience and strength come with age. With this issue, *Landscape Management (LM)* magazine begins its 50th year of publishing. We've been around longer than any other publication covering the Green Industry.

But this really isn't about us. In the stories that follow, the editors of *LM* spoke with the leaders of three veteran enterprises that, in the case of two, surpass us in experience, and the third that is just shy of our 50 years. We wanted to get their perspectives on where the Green Industry is right now, how it's changed and where it's going.

Senior Editor Beth Geraci examines the roots of Bartlett Tree Experts, the elder statesman in this veteran trio, to find out how the company has survived (and plans to grow) into its second century. Editor-at-Large Ron Hall explores how Barnes Nursery continues to reinvent itself in an ever-changing marketplace. Finally, Editor-in-Chief Dan Jacobs talks with Grasshopper Lawns — at 47, the youngest member of the group — to find out how different the business is with a second generation running the operation.

Thank you, readers and advertisers, for making the past five decades possible. We're proud to have had the honor to serve the Green Industry for half a century, and we look forward to the next 50 years.

BY: DAN JACOBS, BETH GERACI AND RON HALL

### Bartlett Tree Experts

Francis A. Bartlett must have been on to something when he founded family-owned Bartlett Tree Experts in 1907. He built the company on sound science and ethics — the cornerstones of the company to this day.

Any company that's lasted more than 100 years must be doing something right. The company's come a long way in the last century, and as it creeps into its second one, Bartlett President Greg Daniels shared his insights on what makes the company tick and where Bartlett Tree Experts and the Green Industry are heading today. His outlook is both realistic and optimistic.

Despite the Green Industry's current financial woes, he says, it "still has a lot of good opportunities facing it. The future is very bright."

Why so positive? In today's housing market, Americans now realize that stellar landscaping makes their homes more marketable, explains Daniels. Consequently, demand for freshly paved driveways, garden installations or in Bartlett's case, tree care and preservation, is steady if not growing.

Thanks to technological advances, Green Industry professionals work much more efficiently today than in years past. For Bartlett, technology has been instrumental in streamlining its business process, Daniels says, from wireless communication to being able to produce proposals on site in minutes. Bartlett also now has electronic data on every tree it's worked on in recent years.

Despite technological advances, in some ways, the client demands Bartlett confronts today are the same as those it's faced since Francis A. Bartlett founded the company 104 years ago. Take insect and disease control, for example.

"Every year you read about new insects and diseases that are being introduced into the country," Daniels says. "There always seems to be that cyclical up and down of insect and disease prob-



# SOWING THE SEEDS OF HISTORY

