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ServiceMaster's Mullany seeks to re-energize TruGreen

BY RON HALL EDITOR-AT-LARGE

TruGreen LawnCare interim president Thomas G. Brackett has been given the task of improving the performance of the nation's biggest lawn care company.

ServiceMaster chief executive officer Hank Mullany, during ServiceMaster's first-quarter earnings call May 25, said he asked Brackett to focus on three things:

1. Improving customers' experience with TruGreen service, both the results they see on their lawns and also their experience with technicians;

2. Building a culture of "executional excellence" by accelerating the development and sharing of best practices among TruGreen branches as well as between ServiceMaster's Terminix divi-

sion and TruGreen; and

3. More rigorously evaluating and developing TruGreen managerial talent.

One of Mullany's first tasks as ServiceMaster CEO was to replace former TruGreen President Stephen Donly with Brackett, who also serves as president of Terminix. As of this report ServiceMaster was continuing its search for a new president for TruGreen ChemLawn. Mullany emphasized Terminix and TruGreen will remain separate divisions.

"We need to fix our TruGreen LawnCare business," said Mullany, who took over as CEO of ServiceMaster in February on the resignation of J. Patrick Spainhour. Mullany said he spent much of his first 100 days visiting branch operations and talking to ServiceMaster franchise owners.

Mullany said TruGreen, which he asserted has a 12% market penetration, must do a better job of converting non-users into customers and also of retaining customers.

"Our customer service hasn't been good enough or consistent enough," he said, pointing out that although the division's revenues are ahead of 2010, they are still below 2007 levels, which he termed "simply unacceptable."

TruGreen posted operating losses of \$10.4 million in the first quarter, although its revenues were up 10% in the first quarter from the same period in 2010.

ServiceMaster brands include TruGreen, Terminix, American Home Shield, ServiceMaster Clean and Merry Maids. Its 5,000 locations and franchises deliver services to homes and businesses.

SPRINTURF ACQUIRES IC IMPROVEMENTS

Sprinturf, an artificial turf company based in Valley Forge, PA, has acquired Ontario, Canada-based IC Improvements (ICI).

The new company in Canada, to be called Sprinturf-ICI Canada, will be, Sprinturf stated, the first fully integrated Canadian turf company with all manufacturing done in house.

In announcing the acquisition, Rom Reddy, managing partner of ITS-Sprinturf Holdings LLC, said in a release, "The acquisition of ICI, one of the top Canadian artificial turf companies, builds on Sprinturf's strategy of growing the athletic business geographically and broadening the base of Sprinturf into non-athletic applications."

Report shows Bayer strengthening commitment to sustainability

LEVERKUSEN, GERMANY — Bayer is presenting its Sustainable Development Report for 2010 and strengthening its commitment to sustainability. At more than 72 pages, the newly published report documents the progress made in the key areas of climate protection, health care provision and nutrition for a growing world population and further achievements made by the Group in the field of sustainability.

"We use our commitment to sustainability to tackle the key global challenges and drive forward economic growth in harmony with ecological and social interests," said Dr. Wolfgang Plischke, member of the Bayer AG Board of Management responsible for Innovation, Technology and Environment.

The Bayer Sustainable Development Report 2010 and further information is available online at www.sustainability.bayer.com.

Plischke (right) with UN's W. Engshuber.



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Scotts Professional becomes Everris

The Scotts Miracle-Gro Company sold its Professional Division to the ICL Group in February. Then, on May 25, executives from Scotts Professional and ICL Specialty Fertilizers announced a new name for the global business: Everris.

The name Everris, which means “green” in Spanish, French and Italian, represents the new company’s commitment to further improving the technologies, products and services it offers worldwide.

Everris will continue to develop plant nutrition brands and products, including Osmocote, Peters, Universol, Agriform and more. According to Everris CEO Fred Bosch, the company’s new tagline, “Ever Rising,” emphasizes its goal of providing ornamental horticulture growers, turf managers, landscapers and farmers



with professional products and innovative, sustainable solutions to their problems.

Everris will strive to maintain the momentum generated by its recent products for container nursery stock growers, continuing to emphasize the company’s goal of delivering environmentally sound products.

“For years, we’ve helped growers and turf managers to design smarter nutritional programs and plant protection programs that often combine our unique technologies (such as controlled, slow

release, water soluble and foliar) to feed plants exactly what they need, when they need it,” Bosch stated in a release. “Everris combines the technical expertise and resources of both Scotts and ICL, making us well-poised to take our innovative spirit to the next level.”

In the United Kingdom, Everris recently registered PlantTrust, a new product featuring Controlled Release Control (CRC) technology. Based on the principles of controlled-release fertilizer technology, PlantTrust releases starter nutrients while protecting against the pathogen phytophthora.

According to Everris, the combination of nutrition and plant protection results from years of development and more than 100 scientific field trials. Within the next few years, Everris will introduce PlantTrust to other European countries.

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PROGRESS

Moving forward

A look at how the industry's national organizations have evolved since their early days

The Green Industry has changed dramatically over the years, and — whether eagerly or reluctantly — its national organizations have evolved with it.

Gone are the days when landscape professionals didn't concern themselves with regulations, when sharing ideas was their primary focus.

In their place is a booming landscape industry that has grown exponentially from its more modest beginnings. It's confronted now by controversial environmental, immigration and water-related regulations.

Despite the changes, industry movers and shakers of past and present say the mutual support of fellow landscape professionals is one thing that hasn't changed.

The Associated Landscape Contractors of America (ALCA) original board member Tom Leid said what appealed to him first and foremost about ALCA was "that I was a young contractor at the time, and I was rubbing shoulders with some astute contractors from all over the country. I stood to learn a great deal from them."

Ultimately, he said. "I learned from them that landscape contracting is a business as worthwhile as any contracting business; it is not second rate. I thought I was a little pimple in the pond, but people looked to me, too."

Ron Kujawa joined ALCA in 1972 because "we felt it was in our best



interest to join a national group. Because there was a free exchange of ideas. Because you weren't sitting down with competitors and trying to outdo each other."

ALCA's founding fathers — a board of about 20 landscape professionals — had both good and bad ideas in the beginning, Leid said. Among the bad ideas, he said, were, first, that ALCA should limit competition and, second, ALCA should be a buying group. Actually, he said, "competition is the best thing for an astute company" and "we discovered that being a major buying group wasn't acceptable as a goal."

The group's good ideas, Leid said, centered on contactors' emphasis on listening to and learning from one another, as well as teaching the next generation that they were businesspeople first, artisans second, Leid said.

When ALCA merged with the Professional Lawn Care Association of America (PLCAA) about six years ago to form the Professional Landcare Network (PLANET), those educational ideals were not lost.

Today, PLANET has adapted to present day issues, but, as in older times, its leadership still strives to provide answers to its members and students who will shape the landscape industry of tomorrow.

Kurt Kluznik, who in 2005 was ALCA's final president before it merged with PLCAA to form PLANET, is now a PLANET board member and has

served as a PLANET Trailblazer for three years. He and other Trailblazers mentor students and other industry newcomers.

"These students are going to hit the deck running. They're going to hit it in fourth gear," he said. "The rate of innovation in the industry will continue to accelerate based on these young people's enthusiasm and technological knowledge."

In his 40 years in the business, Kluznik's seen lots of change in the industry's national organizations. PLANET experienced growing pains at first, Kluznik said, but by now it has matured and established a firm identity.

Combining the networking-savvy ALCA and the government affairs-savvy PLCAA "created a more powerful, influential group" in PLANET, he said.

With the merger, ALCA and PLCAA morphed from medium-sized businesses "with strained resources," Kluznik said, "to a much larger business with much larger resources."

PLANET provides valuable strategic insights into what is happening in the landscape marketplace, and therefore has immersed itself in major issues such as sustainability, immigration, water use and more, Kluznik said.

"Our industry was green before the term 'green' was even coined," he said. "Now 'green' has taken on a whole new meaning.... The environment — both figuratively and literally — has changed dramatically in the last 10 years."

As for the industry's national organizations, perhaps Kujawa said it best: "Belonging to ALCA and subsequently to PLANET has had a profound impact upon my personal and professional growth. I think the most important thing I've ever learned in life is to know what I didn't know." As a result of sharing ideas with others in national organizations, he said, "I was able to find out things from people who did know."



An industry-changing property?

Meet Mark Baker and Nonnie Chrystal. What they're doing could change our industry. If it doesn't, it won't be from lack of effort on their part.

Husband, wife and business partners, they built and live in the Florida Showcase Green Enviro-home (FSGE) in Indialantic, FL. FOX News called the two-story, 3,292-sq.-ft. structure the "greenest house in the world."

Hyperbole or not, the FSGE is a rock star "green" house. *USA Today*, *Florida Today*, and dozens of other newspapers and magazines, both consumer and trade, have reported on it. Hardly a day goes by that Nonnie doesn't field requests for tours or interviews.

We met Mark and Nonnie this spring at a regional conference of the American Society

of Irrigation Consultants in Orlando. Their shared vision of a sustainable home and landscape is stunning. They describe their home as being "near" zero-loss, zero-energy, zero-maintenance and zero-runoff. To date, the data supports their claims. The home meets or exceeds 12 green building certifications, including LEED Platinum.

One of the components allowing it to earn green building accolades, of course, is its landscape.

The performance of the ornamentals and turf, like almost every feature of FSGE, has been excruciatingly monitored almost since Mark, an experienced builder and president of Mark Baker LLC, laid the first footer on the quarter-acre property in June 2007.

Native plants, only those that were in the region to greet Ponce DeLeon when he stepped ashore in April 1513, beautify the property, says Nonnie. Now well established, they require no irrigation and incredibly small amounts of maintenance.

The same goes for the small areas of paspalum and sunshine mimosa turfgrass on the property.

The landscape's most notable feature is 869 sq. ft. of green roof plantings; the great majority of plant material is on the house. There's also a small green roof on the pool outbuilding. The green roof on the house is irrigated from captured rainwater from the house.

Three, underground, 1,728-gal. cisterns capture runoff from the home's green roof areas. Special gutters on the home filter the rainwater before it enters the cisterns. The cisterns are daisy-chained so that the water level remains the same in all three. A low-energy, frequency-driven pump returns the water to the green roof for irrigation. Graywater from the shower, bathroom sinks and clothes washers is double filtered and ozonated before it's used to flush toilets in the house.

Most striking of all is how well the site contains stormwater runoff, in part because of a 100-sq.-ft. bioswale. The only measurable runoff from FSGE occurred in Aug. 2008 when Tropical Storm Fay dumped 25.5 in. of rain. This was before pervious Flexi-Pave made from recycled tires replaced pavement surfaces. Otherwise, the property has contained all the stormwater it has received, says Nonnie.

While water conservation is vital, in the long run, by itself, it won't be nearly enough to sustain Florida or its growth, says Nonnie. This will require a much better understanding of how to recycle water; capture, purify and store runoff; and recharge the state's aquifers.

She says the home she and Mark built, and which is being studied and monitored by the University of Central Florida, is providing proof this can be done without the need for massive new infrastructure. Eventually, governmental agencies will realize this and implement policies to make it happen at the homeowner level, she says.

Once that happens the implications for the landscape industry should be obvious.



Nonnie Chrystal and Mark Baker



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THE BENCHMARK

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What affluent prospects buy

Not so long ago I spent some valuable time with the purchaser of a \$1 million landscape. I was seeking a better understanding of what an affluent prospect thinks when considering a purchase. The purchaser graciously provided some great insights on selling to clients like himself.

As we walked together through the yard and his 15,000-sq.-ft. home, he tried to convince me that he was just a regular guy, like the rest of us. But of course he wasn't. He could easily afford a \$1 million landscape. But it became clear that what he wouldn't tolerate was, of all things, unpleasantness.

Value vs. price

It didn't take long to realize that a customer who spends \$100,000 on a landscape does not buy the same as one spending \$10,000. These two clients live in different universes. They approach buying decisions with different mindsets.

In the May 2011 issue of *Landscape Management*, my column, "Selling small jobs", offered a process for selling smaller jobs. Price and speed are critical for these sales. Price and speed are important, but not as much for well-to-do prospects.

Almost certainly, most rich prospects will try to get the best price they can. They're used to negotiating and most are pretty good at it. That's one of the reasons they have money. But, typically, they'll spend what's necessary to get what they want. Pushing your price button is their way of testing you. Your experience. Your confidence.

The rich person's biggest annoyance is the **construction mistakes** that **create havoc** on their properties.

They want competence

That's because, in the end, it's competence they seek, and usually not the lowest price. That's why, instead of giving them price concessions, the skilled salesperson gives them reasons to buy based on value. The salesperson emphasizes his or her firm's design and installation experience/expertise and what that means in terms of the entire project.

Most high-income customers want value and hate surprises and slip-ups. Highest on the surprise list are cost overruns. Customers associate shocking unplanned expenses with incompetence. Most view incompetence as unacceptable. When they've been promised competence, that's exactly what they expect.

Surprises most often result from weak designs that don't anticipate problems inherent in any construction job. Strong designs anticipate and precisely incorporate common problems into the price.

But the rich client's biggest annoyance (unpleasantness) is the construction mistakes that create havoc on their properties. The causes of 90% of these mess-ups result from poor lead-time planning and project management. Most clients, affluent or otherwise, want you invisible and gone.

So what does that mean to your sales process?

Obviously, these clients want to hear about and need to be convinced of the ways your strong production management system eliminates these mistakes. They're looking for competence combined with confidence at point of sale.

Of course, you will have to talk price with the well-heeled prospect as you would with any potential client. But you might want to add language similar to what this successful salesperson used on a real-life prospect: "I suggest that you consider the stress a weak design and poor production process will cause you and your wife. I've seen it a hundred times. The real question here is not price, but the kind of experience and end result you want to have."

He made the sale.