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—Andrew Adams
Capital Turf Management
Willow Grove, PA



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The total package

Adding an irrigation division made Hayden Landscaping a one-stop-shop.

Hayden Landscaping cross-trains all of its full-time employees on multiple services.



RICK HAYDEN WAS on the brink of losing jobs. His clientele wanted a one-stop shop that offered an irrigation package along with everything else he did for them (seeding, install and design).

Because he struggled to find good subcontractors offering the service, it came down to adding the division himself or losing the work. Hayden, second-generation owner of Hayden Landscaping in Greenup, IL, knew expanding was his best option. That was in the 1980s, and it's remained a profitable division ever since, comprising approximately 40% of the company's annual revenue.

Back then Hayden was doing a lot more commercial work. Today, about 65% of his jobs are residential as the need for residential irrigation work has grown. Regardless of going commercial or residential, his biggest piece of advice to other contractors looking to enter the field is to get educated. "Whether it's through your local supplier or the Irrigation Association, there's a lot to learn, so it's important to find a good source of information," he says. "This is not something you can just jump into."

TRAINING TECHS

Hayden says the biggest obstacle he's had to overcome is finding other qualified irrigation techs to work with. "When you grow big enough where you can't do it all yourself, finding qualified help can become a problem," he says. "You can't just go on the street and find someone. There's a lot of education and training involved."

Hayden has overcome that challenge by being diligent in good hiring and also cross-training all of his full-time employees. "Now if one of them is off, each employee can handle almost any other job, at least temporarily," he says.

Irrigation can be a tough field to break into if there's steep competition, but Hayden says in his area, even today, there are few competitors. What has been another challenge, though, and may be keeping competition at bay, is the red tape involved in this field. There are a lot of rules and regulations to adhere to, so keeping up with the latest information is critical.

BUILDING UP

When Hayden first added the division, he had a large existing base of customers who were already requesting the service to tap into. As a result, without much marketing effort, he was able to secure a lot of work. And since he lives in a small community, word-of-mouth spread fast. Hayden says even today he gets a lot of jobs through referrals.

In terms of initial output, Hayden says the diagnostic tools to trace wires, locate valves and do repairs are a necessary investment. "Any type of diagnostic tool is money well spent," he says.

"Other tools like a plow could be rented, and most contractors probably already have the standard tools they'll need."

In addition, it's helpful to carry a fairly extensive inventory at all times so "you can pull into a job and get it done on the spot," says Hayden. Making multiple trips to a job is money lost, so a well-stocked inventory should also be viewed as an investment.

Today, Hayden says he can't picture the company without its irrigation division. It's become a solid part of his business. But, most importantly, it's helped him retain clients by fulfilling their needs.

The author is a freelance writer with six years of experience covering landscaping.

» SERVICE SNAPSHOT

COMPANY NAME: Hayden Landscaping

HEADQUARTERS: Greenup, IL

WHY IRRIGATION? Existing clients had irrigation needs and wanted a one-stop shop experience.

INITIAL INVESTMENT: About \$15,000 for tools and inventory, but something to haul tools and inventory is also required: a vehicle and possibly also a trailer.

INVESTMENT RECOUP TIME: A couple of years (longer if including vehicle and trailer expenses).

WHY CUSTOMERS LIKE IT? Customers spend a lot of money to make their yard look nice, and irrigation helps them get that full benefit. Plus, a lot of towns now require it.

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AT A GLANCE

COMPANY:

Fairway Green Inc.

ONLINE:

FairwayGreenInc.com

PRESIDENT: Robert Windish

INDUSTRY INVOLVEMENT:

Longtime member of PLCAA & PLANET, PLANET Trailblazer

HEADQUARTERS: Hillsborough, NJ (sole location)

SERVICE AREA: Central Jersey

FOUNDED: 1987

EMPLOYEES: 35

SERVICES: lawn care, tree and shrub care, tick control, core aeration, liming, seeding, deer repellent, geese control

PERSONAL HIGHLIGHTS/HOBBIES:

Golf ("wish I had time to golf more"), travel, scuba diving

FAMILY: Wife and two daughters

For nearly a quarter of a century, **Robert Windish** has owned and operated Fairway Green, serving the homeowners of central New Jersey. He's learned a lot in those years and, like many leaders, he's decided to share that knowledge with the rest of the industry. Windish is one of the Professional Landcare Network's (PLANET) Trailblazers, a program that gives less-experienced lawn service professionals an opportunity to spend time and learn from lawn care veterans.

Robert, tell us how and why you became involved. The Trailblazer program is a great opportunity to give back to the industry and help someone from a non-competing market who's just getting started or needs some help. When I became a PLCAA member more than 20 years ago, I got involved with the education committee. The others on the committee were older and more experienced in the industry than I was. I felt quite comfortable talking lawn care, both technical and business with them — kind of like today's Trailblazer program.

What have you found to be most rewarding about being involved with PLANET? The friendships you develop. I look forward to seeing them at industry events and sharing experiences with them, what's working and not working.

In a nutshell, describe your market and your customers. We're about a 50-minute drive from New York City if there's

no traffic. We provide services in about a 25-mile radius in central New Jersey. The lawns we treat are large compared to other regions of the country. They average about 22,000 sq. ft. There are a lot of professional people in our market, and they don't have time to do their own lawn care.

How would you describe your growth strategy? I grow my business based on the quality of people I can bring into the business. For the most part, I've been lucky. There was a time after I started the business when I wanted to grow it into multiple branches. As I got older, maybe I got smarter. I decided I didn't want to go that route.

Describe the biggest competitive challenge facing your company. Over the past few years, more customers purchase by price — so we're constantly battling against lower prices offered by the largest lawn care companies. We may be one of the most

expensive companies in our market — maybe the most expensive — because we offer superior service.

Share any changes you will be making in your marketing or operations for 2011.

We continue to search for superior products that will add efficiencies in delivering our services.

How do you see the 2011 season compared to 2010? It looks like the people who normally spend money on services will continue to do so. But new customers who have not typically purchased service-related products will continue to be hard to find.

What are your feelings regarding the proposed Child Safe Playing Field Act that, if passed, would ban pesticide use on all New Jersey school grounds? The Green Industry has to unite and take a stand on issues that threaten our industry, the loss of thousands of jobs and our personal liveli-

hoods. Too many companies are unaware of this proposed legislation that ultimately will affect them. Whether you're a small one-man company or a multiple-branch national company, you have to get involved. Once we concede an issue like this, which is purely emotional and has no scientific basis, what's next? We've all seen what's happened in Canada, where lawn care chemicals have been banned. It could happen here.

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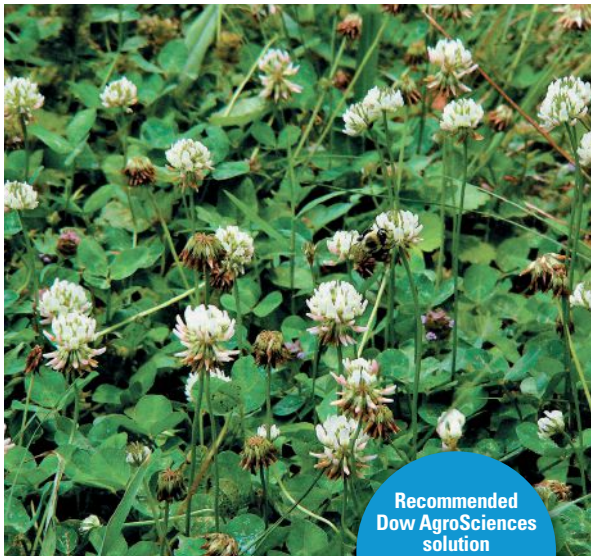
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WHITE CLOVER *Trifolium repens*

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This low-growing, creeping winter perennial has stems that root at nodes.
- ▶ Its tooth-edged elliptical leaves, in groups of three, usually have a light-green or white band like a watermark.
- ▶ White to pink-tinged flower clusters grow from long stems that usually rise above the leaves.
- ▶ Active growth from seeds or plants begins with cooler temperatures and increased moisture.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Mechanical or physical removal is not recommended. Stolons may break, which increases the potential for more infestation.
- ▶ Apply a post-emergent granule herbicide labeled for white clover control, ideally prior to flowering in fall or late winter. Follow the label directions for appropriate timing and spread rates.



Recommended
Dow AgroSciences
solution
Snapshot® specialty
herbicide*

CARPETWEED *Mollugo verticillata*

IDENTIFICATION TIPS

- ▶ This late-germinating, heavily branched summer annual forms circular patches several feet in diameter.
- ▶ Light-green leaves are smooth in whorls of three to eight at each node — widest above the middle and tapering to the base.
- ▶ Stems are smooth and branched, lying on the ground with tips ascending.
- ▶ Small, white flowers cluster with slender, long stalks.

CONTROL TIPS

- ▶ Apply a pre-emergent herbicide prior to germination (before the soil temperatures reach 65° F) in the spring. Most pre-emergent herbicides will control a broad range of species, so be sure to select a product labeled for carpetweed control.
- ▶ In a lawn setting, maintain a proper turf-grass mowing height. A base fertilizer program will encourage a lush lawn to compete with carpetweed.

* State restrictions on the sale and use of LockUp and Snapshot apply. Consult the label before purchase or use for full details.

For more information regarding these and other turf weeds — and related control technologies and tips — please visit www.DowProvesIt.com or call 800/255-3726.

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

GO TO THE SOURCE

Planning and partners ease plant material sourcing frustrations.

BY JAMIE J. GOOCH

A trusted supplier can select plants for you, per your specifications.

YOU'VE JUST sent out a bid for all the plants on a big residential landscape. The bid comes back, you tell the designer everything is set and place the order ... only to find the size you specified isn't actually available. Back to the phone you go.

While buying live goods that can sometimes take years to grow is never going to be as easy as picking up a carton of milk, there are ways to make the process go more smoothly.

Communicate with all involved

Jim Reddington has been a buyer at LP Statile, a re-wholesaler in Springfield, NJ,

for 27 years. He has seen what causes bottlenecks and misfires in the plant sourcing pipeline.

"The biggest thing is when a contractor comes in with a plan for a job that was designed by an outside architect, and the material specified is not available in that variety or size," he says. "Landscape contractors are often reluctant to communicate with the architect to make changes."

Reddington says quite often the architect is not familiar with the local market and availability of the plant material. Also, there is usually some lag time between the design and installation, during which

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the material becomes unavailable.

"In the case of a job designed by an outside architect, get communication going with them to find out what they're open to in terms of substitutions," he says. "A lot of times contractors feel bound to the design and maybe the architect is completely open to substitutions."

The same advice holds true for landscapers who deal directly with homeowners. Giving them several options upfront depending on availability can avert disappointment down the road.

"When I first started doing this, I was more flexible with substitutions," says Cecily Gordon, an estimator at New Canaan Landscaping in San Jose, CA. The company focuses on high-end residential landscapes. "Now I am true to my list. If there are problems where something is unavailable or needs substitutions, I give notice to the architect. Sometimes they don't care and roll right with it, and sometimes you find out the client had their heart set on this specific plant or tree."

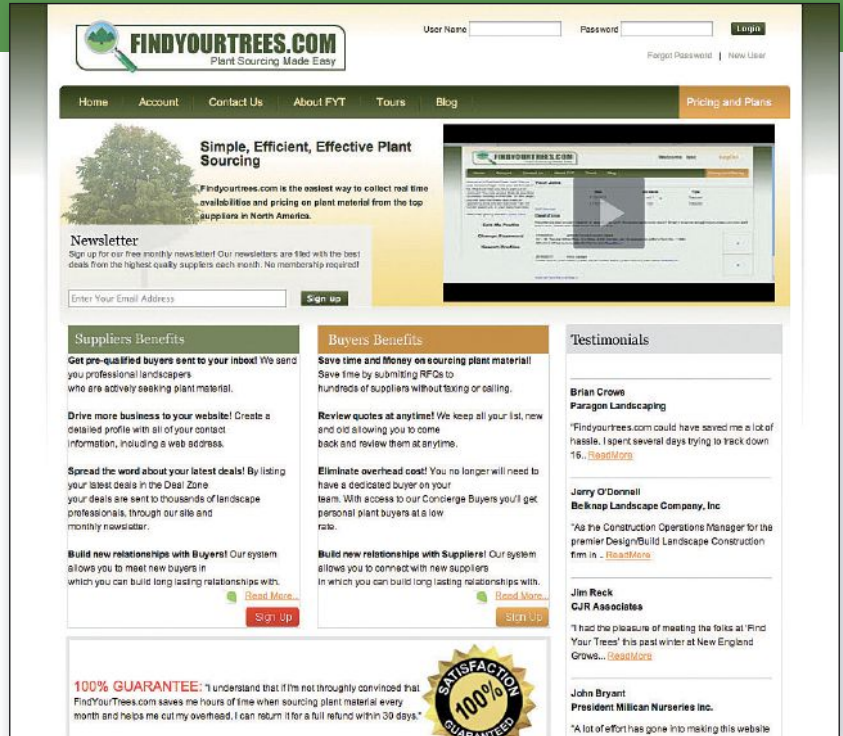
Build relationships

The landscape industry needs each other. Landscape architects need contractors, contractors need wholesalers, and wholesalers need growers. The right relationships are critical to business, but oftentimes there is a disconnect among the many moving parts of the landscape supply chain.

Colby Jordan, founder of findyourtrees.com, says he saw that disconnect when his father ran into plant sourcing issues and Jordan, still in his 20s, couldn't believe he was not able to find plants online. After a year of testing, Jordan launched his plant sourcing site a year ago.

While some may think of intermediate sites as being efficient but impersonal, Jordan sees it as a networking tool.

"I see our tool as building relationships between buyers and suppliers," he



says. "We're getting people to respond to each other and making sure everyone's introduced."

Gordon also stresses the importance of building relationships.

"I am working with growers and nurseries who know me and know the company," she says. "They know the quality we demand and I know what they provide. There's a significant amount of energy saved knowing I can trust our partners to provide what we expect. It's worth the time building that relationship upfront."

Once trust is built, she says suppliers are often able to provide photos of their stock with size and quality specifications — saving the landscape company from hand picking many of its orders.

Have a plan

Upfront organization also pays off exponentially when sourcing plants.

Gordon enters all the bid information she receives in a template to record the plants, sizing and source.

"Many times, we bid a project and

Findyourtrees.com has partnered with industry associations to offer discounts on its plant sourcing services.

then six months or a year later you need to find it," she says. "It's important to create a system that others can step in and use. Creating that type of system will save time over the long haul."

It also helps to plan orders in advance. But that's easier said than done.

"The bulk of our customers are walk-ins," says Reddington. "They come in and purchase that day. But it does help to pre-order, even if it's just a day or two. That allows us to assemble the order in the yard to make it easier to pick up."

Planning is especially important for hard-to-source items, such as large specialty trees, native plants and bulbs — anything that is out of the ordinary.

Gordon says native plantings are a good example. Designers may specify a native meadow with thousands of plugs

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