

Todd Williams

“Business has been challenging in the last couple years, but our long-term clients and contracts have helped us weather the storm fairly well,” says **Todd Williams**, executive vice president of Terracare Associates. Terracare’s ability to maintain strong client relationships and keep up with industry trends has enabled it to stay competitive during the recession, and now Williams stops to discuss with *LM* where the company — and the maintenance industry — is headed today.

TOP TRENDS

› **Sustainability.** We are seeing more clients focus on having landscapes that use fewer resources or are sustainable in nature. This trend is positive for our enhancement business, as landscapes are converted from turf to other types of uses. As an organization, our passion is to be stewards of our local environment while protecting the health, safety and welfare of our communities, clients and staff. Environmental sustainability is at the core of who we are. As our reputation and clientele continue to grow and diversify, the standard of excellence we strive to meet every day keeps us at the forefront of our industry.

› **Technology.** Technology is finding its way into our business more and more all the time. GPS, handheld data collection and Internet-based solutions are becoming the norm rather than cutting-edge. We utilize an integrated business management tool known as Asset, which eliminates the need for multiple software systems to operate our business and significantly reduces overhead by eliminating redundant processes in our company. Additionally, our field crews utilize CREWtek, a handheld device that lets our staff manage projects remotely, handle billing, manage equipment and schedule crews efficiently and effectively. It ensures our teams know where they are going and what tasks they need to perform. Additionally, we utilize our growing social media network to develop business relationships with our key clients.

› **Water efficiency.** We have converted a significant amount of the irrigation systems we maintain to evapotranspiration and Internet-based controls. Assisting our clients in conserving water and saving money is a key focus in how we approach the maintenance of a property’s irrigation system. Our technicians

INSIDE INFO

Company: Terracare Associates
Headquarters: Denver
Employees: 250 full-time (plus 125 seasonal and part-time)
2010 revenue: \$26 million

Key to being a maintenance leader: Providing a progressive and supportive culture for employees is key. We try to really challenge our people, but at the same time provide them with the right amount of support so they can succeed. It is important our people feel they are a part of the family, and something bigger than just a job. As a company, we encourage participation by all employees in developing creative ways to solve problems, improve effectiveness and grow our business. Members of the staff often participate in company-sponsored volunteer committees tasked with improving our safety standards, expanding into peripheral business opportunities, or becoming more sustainable in our business practices.

are highly trained in evaluating and providing solutions to the customer with the most innovative water conservation tools available for the site conditions. Our goal is to save our clients water and money without sacrificing the beauty of their landscapes.

TOP OBSTACLES

› **Competition.** We are seeing the market prices for maintenance services go down fairly significantly. Creating continued efficiencies and cost savings is critical for survival. Unfortunately, we are seeing more work go for below fair market value, but you can’t blame owners for wanting to save all they can. Our goal is to target clients who place a value on the professionalism we bring to the table.

› **Labor availability.** The landscape industry is a very labor-intensive one. Forging of documents and now identity theft are rampant problems, and the current national immigration policy puts employers in a terrible position of having to be the enforcer of immigration laws — with very little tools or support to accomplish this. We use the H2B program in Colorado. It’s a seasonal guest worker program that allows employers to recruit and hire seasonal workers from other countries, but it is a program that is more difficult and expensive to use all the time.

TOP OPPORTUNITY

› **Enhancements, with landscape use changes and water efficiency in mind.** There is a real return on investment for many clients. Selling that return is key to generating the work. Our continued success depends on our ability to capitalize on our expanding service lines and project portfolio. This requires that we approach every project with a more holistic approach to landscape maintenance and environmental development.

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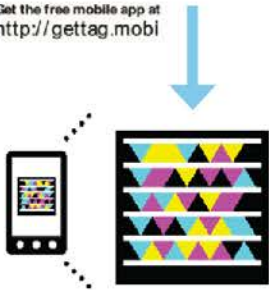
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MYBIGGESTMISTAKE

LESSONS LEARNED THE HARD WAY » BY CASEY PAYTON



DeSantis Landscapes, like every other business, has left a carbon footprint on the environment. But today, the company is looking to erase that mark.

DEAN DESANTIS HAS always had an appreciation for the environment. But after spending six post-college years traveling abroad, he was even more deeply affected by what he saw.

"I was able to see firsthand the effects of what man had done to our environment around the world," says the president of Oregon-based DeSantis Landscapes, which has offices in Salem and Portland. "That really hit home for me."

Today, as a business owner, DeSantis has been able to do something about it. The process has been an invaluable lesson.

Since the company started focusing on improving the environmental impact of its internal business operations back in 2005 (now branded as the "Earth Sense" program), some serious changes have taken place for the \$4 million business. Today, DeSantis Landscapes, a company that is 50/50 in design/build and maintenance services, has reduced its carbon dioxide emissions by more than 500,000 lbs. That's the equivalent of taking 45 vehicles off of the road. At the same time, the company is saving money on fuel costs, receiving tax breaks, and enhancing its reputation as a leader in sustainability.

One of the biggest

changes that DeSantis made was to switch his management team members from pickup trucks to hybrid passenger cars.

"I drive a Prius and get 45 miles to the gallon, which is a big difference from what I used to get in my pickup," says DeSantis.

The company has also made the switch to biodiesel instead of petroleum diesel for its fleet of trucks, tractors, large mowers and other equipment. DeSantis says that switch was a big learning experience.

"We have two 500-gallon tanks on-site where we store fuel, and one of the things that happened was that the biodiesel actually started to clean the inside of the tank by getting all of that crud and gunk off of the sides. The problem is that it started going into our fuel lines...but as soon as we got over that hump, we haven't had any problems."

DeSantis is now also working with the local office of Enterprise Fleet Management, a full-service fleet management company for businesses with medium-sized fleets, to offset 100% of the company's verifiable greenhouse gas emissions for the entire fleet. It's part of Enterprise's nationwide comprehensive environmental platform pledge to match a portion of each customer's greenhouse gas offset

purchases (up to a national total of \$1 million).

While these changes are starting to pay off for DeSantis, the cost of going green isn't always cheap upfront. But DeSantis says the return on investment does come eventually.

Take, for example, the solar panels that the company had installed on its roof. DeSantis says that the projected return on investment was about 3-and-a-half years, a time span he's just reached. He now expects to save about 15% to 18% on power costs.

And it's important to remember that payoff also comes in the form of goodwill and good publicity. DeSantis says he feels great about what he's doing for the environment, but it's also been a wise business decision to let other people know about his efforts.

"We knew we couldn't just roll this out quietly," he says. "We also needed to couple the efforts we were taking internally with education for our clients, so we developed several informational pieces and put them on our website for people to access."

Today, DeSantis is proud of what he's achieved — and he looks forward to doing even more. He's become a leader of sustainability and hopes others will follow in his footsteps, adding: "I'm reminded of a quote that says the best time to plant a tree is 100 years ago, but the next best time is *today*."

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



Dean DeSantis

COMPANY: DeSantis Landscapes Inc.

PRESIDENT: Dean DeSantis

HEADQUARTERS: Salem, OR (with a branch office in Oregon City)

CLIENT MIX: 60% residential; 40% commercial

SERVICE BREAKDOWN: 50% design/build; 50% maintenance

2010 REVENUE: \$4 million

NO. OF EMPLOYEES: 60 employees in peak season



Project EverGreen: Continuing to Make a Measurable Difference

By Norman Goldenberg, President
Project EverGreen Board of Directors

Just six years ago, with the support of our contributors, staff and industry partners, Project EverGreen launched an effort to preserve and enhance green spaces in our communities for today and future generations.

We remain committed to winning the hearts and minds of consumers by using local grassroots efforts to carry the resonating message about green spaces throughout America—ultimately sustaining the vibrant green industry that makes it all possible.

Highlights:

- The Milwaukee EverGreen Zone launched with landscape personality, Melinda Myers, as spokesperson.
- Our third EverGreen Zone launched in North Carolina in Spring 2010.
- We officially launched Project EverGreen in Canada.
- Green industry companies are now including the Project EverGreen logo into their business and marketing materials.
- A new hosta named for GreenCaare for Troops goes on sale this summer.
- We continue working closely with other green industry associations to help educate consumers about how we are positively impacting green spaces.
- Holiday CD by Little Chicago is a big hit nationwide.

EverGreen Zone Grassroots Education Program Returned in Akron, Ohio and launched in Milwaukee, Wisconsin in 2009

Independent research verifies that we continue to increase consumer awareness about the benefits of green spaces. By educating consumers through EverGreen Zones, we are changing consumer attitudes.

Change in Awareness:



GreenCare for Troops Continues to Grow

- The total number of families grew by 21% in 2009.
- The total number of volunteers grew by 20% in 2009.
- Approximately 9,200 military families and more than 2,400 volunteers are involved.



Help Us Spread the Good News About "Managed Green Spaces"

Continue your financial support of Project EverGreen because "a rising tide lifts all boats."

For more information about Project EverGreen go to www.ProjectEverGreen.com or call us toll-free at 1-877-758-4835.

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Project EverGreen: Continuing to Make a Measurable Difference

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