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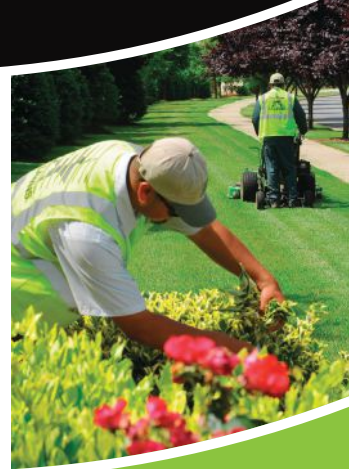
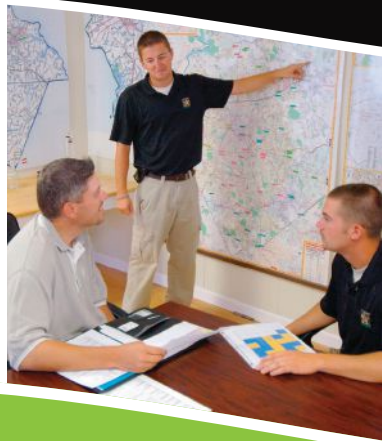
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## A test of character

It was the last day of 5th grade.

A few students and I were helping some of the teachers collect and shelf books in a storage room where they would sit, quickly forgotten, and swelter through summer vacation until they would be distributed to a new class in the fall.

That's when the warning bells went off. Like most kids, my initial reaction was "not another drill, especially on the last day of school." But our teachers' reactions immediately informed us this was no drill — a tornado was on its way.

We were ushered into an inner hallway where we assumed the position. For those of you who live outside Tornado Alley and have never had the pleasure, let me explain. The tornado position involved crouching with your legs tucked under your body with your head resting between your knees and your hands laced over the back of your neck.

It was extremely uncomfortable, and looking back, had the tornado struck our school, I think the only thing that position would have protected us from was actually seeing the cinder blocks fall on top of us.

But spending an hour or more doing our best impressions of a turtle really took a great deal of joy out of the best day of school.

---

Our teachers' reactions immediately informed us this was no drill —  
**a tornado was on its way.**

When the storm passed and the danger subsided, we were allowed to go back to our classrooms, gather our things and finally, head home.

Over the years, a few tornado warnings have forced our family to head to the basement. And just last year at GIE+EXPO, the warning bell went off in our hotel room just after we arrived. We were sent to the basement of our hotel for about 20 minutes until the dangerous storms passed through Louisville.

I've been lucky. I've never suffered any damage from one of Mother Nature's most violent creations.

That can't be said for a few of the people we talked with for this month's cover story, "When disaster strikes" (beginning on page 10). We talk with the top executives at four companies that have lived through some of the worst disasters our country has seen.

These companies survived tornadoes, floods and a hurricane and did so with remarkably positive attitudes. The damage inflicted on them varied, but they all faced disruption of services.

It's easy for company owners to treat their employees well during the good times. It shows an extraordinary character to treat them as well as these companies did in times of crisis. Let's just say, were I to ever find myself in need of a job, theirs would be the first doors I would knock on.

In this month of Thanksgiving, these business owners have a little something extra to give thanks for. And, I suspect, they have a much better appreciation for all the things that go into keeping their livelihoods alive.

I hope I never have to go through a tornado or hurricane or flood to appreciate what it is that makes my life complete. Let me start by thanking you for continuing to read this publication. Without you, I wouldn't have a job. Thank you. Now, if you'll permit me, I think I'll go home and hug my family.


# DIFFERENT

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# PROGRESS

## Reaching new heights



**T**o say that tree care technology has improved since tree care became a profession in the 1800s is an understatement. The methods and equipment the earliest workers employed seem all-out archaic by today's standards, tree care professionals marvel.

And as dangerous as tree care is — it still stands among the world's top five most dangerous professions — advances in techniques, pesticides and equipment have at least made the profession safer than it used to be.

"The [earliest] gear was pretty primitive compared to the equipment we use today," says R.J. Laverne, a master arborist with The Davey Institute. "As far as hand tools, the hand saw was the tool of choice."

In the 1920s, hand saws began to improve, says Sierra Moreno Mercantile owner Don Blair, whose father, Millard, worked as an arborist for 73 years. Like John Davey, who founded Davey Tree in 1880, and Francis A. Bartlett, who founded Bartlett Tree Experts in 1907, Millard was among the profession's trailblazers.

When the Fanno No. 8 chainsaw was developed in the early 1930s, saws made even greater strides, says Blair. It cut on a push stroke, which made it safer than other saws.

But it wasn't until after World War II that the industry modernized. That's when tools such as power saws, brush chippers and aerial lifts hit the market. "The chainsaw and the aerial lift are two things that took tree surgery from an art to an industry," Blair says.

"The chainsaws we have now are safer, more ergonomically designed," asserts certified arborist Steve Tanaka,

### Tree care is still a risky field, but technological advances have made it a little safer.

manager of the tree division at Artis Tree, Venice, FL.

"You have less fatigue on your body when you're operating them, because they're lighter," he says — much more so than the saws of the 1950s, which were so heavy and hard to maneuver they required two men to operate them.

"Equipment in general has enabled the tree care business to become much safer and faster," says Andy Felix, president of Tree Tech, Foxboro, MA.

#### Plant health

Tree cavity work has improved as well. "The early arborists used to approach holes and cavities in trees much like dentists approach cavities in teeth," Laverne says. "They would use chisels and mallets and chisel away the decayed wood, then they filled the holes or cavities with concrete."

Arborists eventually realized that chiseling breaks through a tree's natural defensive barrier, actually facilitating decay and the spread of disease.

When Dr. Alex Shigo of the USDA Forest Service uncovered how trees process decay in the mid-1970s, it "completely changed the way we look at our pruning standards and the way people make cuts," Blair says. "[Shigo] discovered that cuts didn't need to be painted anymore. He was the guru that brought light to the darkness."

#### Safety advances

According to Laverne, tree care safety is the greatest advance of the last 30 or 40 years. Modern safety mechanisms

reduce injuries, Tanaka adds, citing automatic stops on chippers.

More specialized climbing equipment has made tree work safer as well. Slings hold more weight than they used to, Tanaka says. And the creation of lowering blocks and friction reducers, which allow tree workers to manage more weight in the air and exert less energy, has "greatly increased the scope of what we're doing."

#### Pest control

"In my dad's time, they needed to provide insect control, so they took motor oil and mixed it with ammonia to create an emulsion," Blair says.

Those primitive techniques are long gone. Modern pesticides have brought much better pest control. But they also created a flurry of environmental hazards.

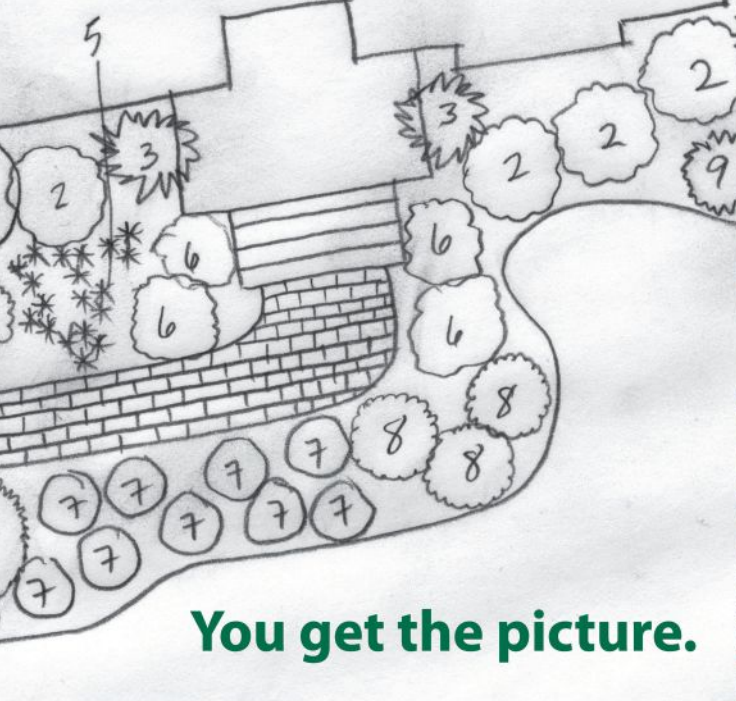
"I remember Dutch Elm Disease was a problem when I was growing up and the tree care companies spraying DDT on the trees in huge volumes — to the dripping point," Laverne says.

Ironically, says Blair, it was Dutch Elm, another product of the 1950s, that increased demand for tree removal and gave rise to the profession.

Rachel Carson's book "Silent Spring" had a huge impact on pesticide use, Laverne says. From it, people came to see that a tree is a living organism capable of fending off pests on its own.

"We now approach the problem by keeping the tree healthy," Laverne says. "It's a whole lot different than the way we used to do things."





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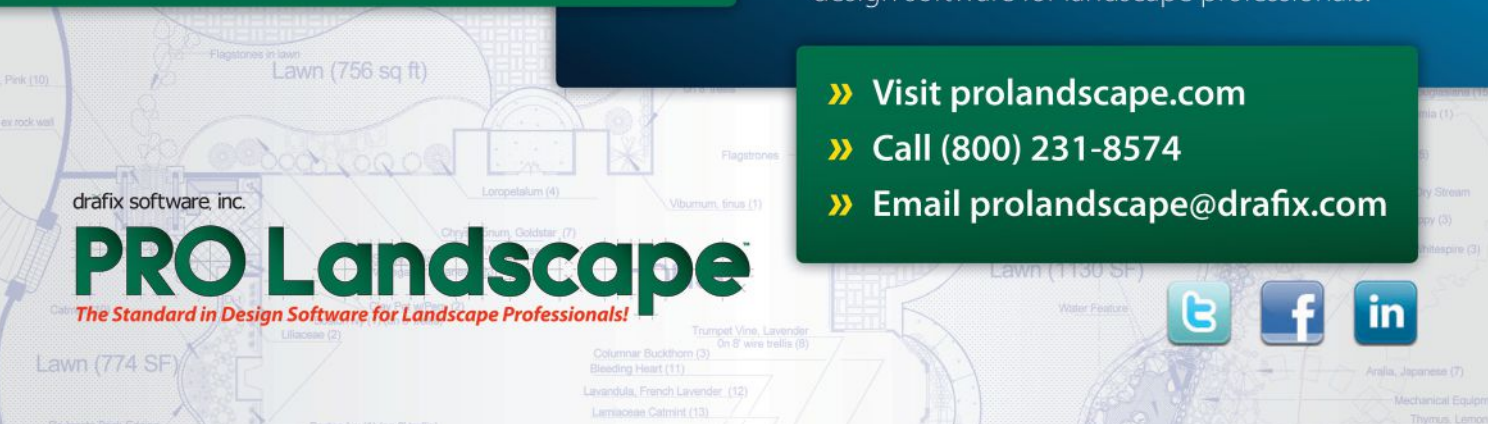
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## More than just a day

**T**hanksgiving at our house started the same way every year — with our dog, Checkers, sprinting laps throughout the house. We didn't need to look outside to know

Grandma had arrived.

Eventually, Checkers would come to a panting halt beside my grandmother in the living room. And there the dog would stay, still as a statue, for the rest of the night.

Our Thanksgivings evolved over time, but the pairing of Grandma and Checkers never changed.

Some families have Christmas or Hanukkah. We have Thanksgiving. For as long as I can remember, it's been the most meaningful holiday in my family. That's because so many of us have made a huge effort over the years to be together on Thanksgiving.

I was going to write about how the changes in our Thanksgiving celebrations reflect the growth in our lives. About how no matter how crazy a year's been, we always find something to be grateful for — even if it's just for being together.

But then I began reading papers, and this column took a slightly different turn.

They were my students' papers. For those of you who don't know, I teach part time at a local university. At the start of our last class, I asked my students to write about their most memorable Thanksgivings.

As I read their papers, I found myself saying one

word, aloud, over and over: "Wow."

I've never taught a group of students quite like this. They're a special group. They care deeply. They've got soul.

Many of my students' writings resonated with happiness, such as the man who proposed to his girlfriend on Thanksgiving (She said "Yes!"). Or the girl whose family once sang a gospel tune to her great aunt, who passed away at age 94.

But there was also the student who remembered a happy Thanksgiving from when he was 10 years old. It was the last time his family was all together.

Another recalled the Thanksgiving he was 6 or 7 years old. He enjoyed it, but his family hasn't celebrated Thanksgiving since.

I tried to imagine life without Thanksgiving — and Thanksgiving without family.

No Grandma winning at Pictionary (Did I mention she was blind?). No Mom cooking a feast. No Dad-led grace before dinner. No Aunt Dor sipping scotch. No kids running amuck. No cousins watching the sunrise together.

I couldn't imagine it. And when I tried to, it made me sad.

It shouldn't have.

Because every family has its own traditions. Even having no tradition can be a tradition.

I loved reading my students' essays. They told vastly different stories, yet they all had one thing in common — sincere gratitude.

Through their writing, my students showed me that no matter where you're from, how you celebrate it, or even if you celebrate it, Thanksgiving is more than just a day on the calendar; it's a sentiment.

So why should I wait until Thanksgiving to express my gratitude when I'm feeling so grateful now?

I shouldn't. To my family, coworkers, students and anyone who's listening, I have one thing to say: Thank you.

---

I tried to imagine **life without Thanksgiving** — and Thanksgiving without family.



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**O**n her way to the bank, driving along one of the few roads that lead into the middle of the small town of Harvest, AL, Judi Pittman looks at a small white house sitting all alone on the barren landscape. She thinks back to a time just a few weeks earlier when she made the same journey. Only then, the house was barely visible through the large trees that obscured the view. “Now it sits there by itself, and it looks so strange,” says Pittman, pres-

ident of Nitro Green Lawn Care.

Those trees fell victim to the most prolific spate of tornadoes this country has ever seen. Hundreds of tornadoes were reported on April 27, including an F5 tornado that wound its way through Harvest.

The storms killed hundreds of people across the country. Fortunately none of Nitro Green’s employees were lost or injured, though several did have damage to their homes.

Disasters, whether they’re tornadoes, hurricanes, floods or some other form of Mother Nature’s wrath, have the potential to uproot more than just trees. What follows are the stories of three companies and how they prepared and lived through the worst nature could throw at them.

# WHEN DISASTER STRIKES

**When Mother Nature turns her wrath on a community, it can be a challenge for businesses on many levels.**

BY **DAN JACOBS** EDITOR-IN-CHIEF