

## form a joint venture

tunities and challenges that require its national trade associations to respond as never before. OFA and ANLA have decided to join forces to expand the capacity of the organizations to better support our members and the industry.”

OFA President Mike McCabe, McCabe’s Greenhouse and Floral (IN) adds, “ANLA and OFA members will have access to the best of both organiza-

tions. OFA brings technical and business development education, industry marketing and a major, international trade show. ANLA represents our industry in Washington D.C., interprets major industry trends and offers owner/senior management education.”

Asked if this was a merger, McCabe replies, “We’re going to work together on lobbying and education first. In sev-

eral years, if both organizations see the joint venture as a value to our members, our intention is to form a new organization serving the horticulture industry.”

Lyons adds, “But for now, there will still be two associations, OFA and ANLA. We will have two staffs, two offices and two leadership structures. Each of the partners grows stronger, but remains an independent business, while their customers benefit from the collaboration.”

## new AEF ambassadors

AEF) scholarship fund, moving both companies to the Platinum Ambassador level. At PLANET’s annual Green Industry Conference in Kentucky this past October, the Ohio Nursery and Landscape Association, which has already donated \$25,000 at the Ambassa-

dor level, pledged an additional \$50,000, bringing its total donation to \$75,000 and also moving it to the Platinum Ambassador level.

In addition, Bruce Moore Sr., Landscape Industry Certified Manager, owner of Eastern Land Management Inc. in

Connecticut, has committed \$25,000, making him the newest PLANET AEF Ambassador.

PLANET AEF was formed in 1998, to promote and advance the lawn care and landscape services industry by supporting academic excellence. To fulfill its mission, the Foundation relies on tax-

*Continued on page 13*

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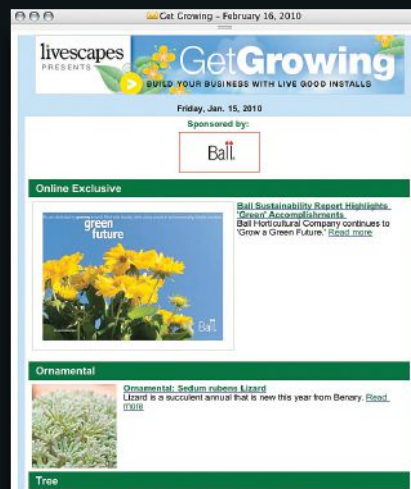


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# MAILBOX

*Continued from page 11*

deductible donations and long-term pledges from individuals, corporations, organizations, and estates. Since its inception in 1998, the PLANET AEF, formerly the ALCA Educational Foundation, has given almost \$600,000 in scholarships and awards to 585 students. The Foundation's assets total more than \$2 million.

Last March, the PLANET AEF board set an aggressive goal of raising the fund balance from \$2 million to \$5 million over the course of the next five years. This ambitious goal is being called the 5-by-5 (\$5 million in 5 years) Plan.

Roger Phelps, Landscape Industry Certified Manager, of Stihl Inc., states, "As a founding sponsor of the PLANET AEF fund, Stihl believes that to ensure the future growth and success of the Green Industry, it is necessary to invest in our students."

## A shade on solar energy?

After reading the latest addition of *Landscape Management* I feel compelled to offer another insight with regard to Renewable Energy. I think all of the green initiatives highlighted are praiseworthy. I applaud the foresight of those who made them a reality. I cannot see one thing wrong with an organization improving its image in the community in which it does business by taking a proactive step in resource conservation.



Where the train comes off the tracks for me is that by "bellying up to the government trough" for financial assistance to justify the ROI of private green initiatives, those responsible are unwittingly enabling the government bureaucracy at all levels to continue the status quo. The industry cannot honestly complain about invasive and counterproductive H-2B and EPA mandates, while simultaneously asking these same agencies for handouts. I contend

that if the industry wants to garner more control over our collective destiny, we need to wean ourselves of government largess. The government only has the power we give it.

— Don Crawford, Operations Manager, Hoy Landscaping Inc., Melrose Park, IL



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# PROGRESS

## Blossoming breakthroughs



**M**any improvements have been made in plant breeding throughout the years, and ornamentals are no exception.

Today's plant developers can select desired traits for ornamentals right in the lab. They couldn't before, says Jeff Gibson, Landscape Business Manager for Ball Horticultural Company. "We're using a lot of advanced scientific methods today to accelerate the identification of plants we want to create," he says.

According to Ryan Contreras, an assistant professor at Oregon State University who deals in ornamental plant breeding and cultivar development, molecular biology is beginning to be used in ornamentals. "We're still in the infancy of that," he says. "The biggest opportunity is using it to identify plants that have genes for resistance, resistance to Dutch Elm Disease, anthracnose, things like that."

Molecular genetics "is the new line of plant breeding," says Rick Schoellhorn, Director of New Products for Proven Winners L.L.C. "Today's plant developers are using the lab to develop hybrids. In horticulture they're finding they can

**Genetics and breeding are at the core of advances in ornamentals.**

make hybrids between things they didn't know they could before.

"That to me is the future of ornamental floriculture breeding," he continues. "You're still creating a new hybrid, but you're doing it in a laboratory now, so everything can be perfect for those two parts to join. That results in plants that are sterile, so they don't produce any seed. Therefore, they will flower for as long as the season lasts."

The advancement in the genetics and breeding of ornamentals, Schoellhorn asserts, is the upshot of intensifying competition among seed and vegetative companies. "That's how the industry progresses," he says. "The progression comes from that competition. It's fascinating to watch and it's nowhere near done."

Traditionally, there was very little advancement in the perennial market, Schoellhorn says, but something happened in the past five years. "Echniacea, for example, is suddenly yellow, orange, white, pink, and now there are hundreds of cultivars on the market. It's in pursuit of a higher plant and also a higher profit for the market," he says.

Trees and shrubs have begun to show breakthroughs, too, displaying better flowering and disease resistance. Genetic attributes of trees and shrubs are being driven in part by the prefer-

To save money, today's customers are turning toward trees and shrubs such as hydrangeas, whose blossoms last multiple seasons.

ences of urban landscape customers, Gibson says, including their desire for compact shrubs that don't grow as high.

And as today's landscaping clients move toward smaller trees and shrubs, they are turning away from pricey flowers, says Gibson, explaining that commercial clients and homeowner associations looking to cut their budgets often cut extras like flowers first.

But many customers are willing to go along when landscapers suggest multiseason trees and shrubs. Customers generally perceive them to be cost effective, he explains, because their blooms last.

Take, for example, hydrangeas, Gibson adds. "If you're planting in a subdivision and your homeowners association doesn't want to plant petunias, they might be willing to plant a hydrangea that changes color over multiple seasons and gives them some color. It's a compromise plant. The idea of multi-season shrubs is very important."

The use of containers in the landscape also is becoming a trend in many markets, Gibson says. A client who is reluctant to plant big beds of colorful plants yet still desires color might opt for placing plants in containers.

"Putting plants into containers up close and personal" is not only a cost-effective compromise, Gibson says. It's also "consistent with a trend toward more compact environments."

Future trends in ornamentals will be determined by more genetic breakthroughs, Schoellhorn asserts. Heirloom varieties aren't going anywhere, he says, "but when you start to look at where the real genetics of breeding is moving, it's just fascinating."



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# LOOKING TO A BRIGHTER FUTURE

**A**s we move into the new lawn and garden season it seems every media outlet is serving us a steady diet of doom and gloom. Certainly the nature of the current U.S. economy makes our job as business owners more challenging. But despite the negative news about the economy, many landscape contracting businesses are not only surviving, but also thriving, in this volatile market. The first thing they will tell you about replicating their success is that you need to “Get Your Priorities Straight.”



One advantage of a tighter economy is that it forces focus — whether we like it or not. It is times like this when every business owner needs to have a few metrics that give them an instant read on the health of their business. In manufacturing we call them Key Performance Indicators (KPIs). The *Landscape Management* editorial staff has done the legwork in gathering which KPIs the biggest and the best contractors look at on a daily, weekly, monthly and quarterly basis to help them maintain a vibrant operation.

As a result, they are able to offer valuable insight into how the top landscape companies are making this economy work for them. They explore how they monitor the health of their businesses, become more efficient and manage their money.

I've always believed you can find opportunity in any kind of economy. My great-grandfather started our family business in 1933 in the midst of the Great Depression. He had to set his priorities, stay focused, and challenge the doom and gloom mindset that surrounded him at the time. But with a small loan borrowed against his life insurance policy he slowly and steadily grew a business that would go on to sustain three more generations of employees.

With a similar tenacity and a sharp focus on priorities, let's use these shared strategies to power through the challenges that hold others back.

Best regards,

DAN ARIENS

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INNOVATIVE  
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# POWERING THROUGH A RECESSION

**R**ecessions are great at teaching company leaders how to trim the fat from their enterprises. But it's true that you can't cut your way to prosperity. *LM* interviewed executives at three companies to learn their strategies for growth.

## THE BRICKMAN GROUP

If any company knows about surviving economic fluctuations, it would be the Brickman Group. The company has survived through feast and famine since its inception in 1939. Today, the Brickman Group maintains a presence in 29 states through 165 branch offices, and wrapped up 2011 with a projected \$850 million to \$900 million in revenue.

The company focuses on commercial work, with landscape maintenance as its core business. Two other core competencies include enhancement services and snow removal, with the latter recently expanding. Value-added services include design, water management, irrigation and technical and horticultural expertise.

Brickman President Mark Hjelle says one of the company's successful strategies is focusing on "constant improvement" of quality, service and efficiency, despite the economy's status. While some companies may make snap deci-

Company executives offer their solutions for surviving challenging economic times.

BY CAROL BRZOZOWSKI

sions in challenging economies, Hjelle points out the service business calls for setting reasonable goals with work teams, inspiring employees to do their best.

"We stay focused on great service and strong client relationships, regardless of economic conditions," he says.

Hjelle says the focus on customer and employee needs are the two biggest metrics in determining the health of the company's business.

"With solid leadership and constantly improving business processes, the financial results follow," he adds. "A lot of times in this type of environment, people try to chase revenue, and if you're not disciplined, there can be a lot of challenges being successful with that strategy."

The company focuses on "delighting" its customers, Hjelle says: "Foremost is taking care of those long-term relationships. We listen to the things that are changing for them, and ask how we can adjust to accommodate their needs. We offer them the additional technical expertise they may desire to look at issues on their sites."

The company focuses on core

values such as doing a task right the first time, and using data to plan its corporate direction. Other values include keeping one's word, making decisions that benefit the team as a whole rather than just one person, and being fair and honest in all dealings, Hjelle says.

The Brickman Group endeavors to train and retain good

