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Construction comeback?

The design/build sector finally shows signs of growth. *By BETH GERACI*

After years of decline, the construction business finally is showing signs of a turnaround, reports *Engineering News-Record* magazine in its latest Construction Industry Confidence Index.

The second-quarter report released in June showed that a record 69 percent of more than 300 respondents felt optimistic about the state of the market, indicating it has stabilized.

Landscape design/build professionals are seeing the positive results firsthand.

"It's definitely turning around, no question about it," says John Mariani, design director at Mariani Landscape, Lake Bluff, Ill. "People are doing some pretty major projects. In fact, in the last few weeks I sold one of the biggest projects I've ever sold."

Lambert's Director of Garden Development Jud Griggs also is encouraged.

Because Texas emerged from the recession last year, Dallas-based Lambert's had a "remarkable" 2012, Griggs says. "Our revenues were about a million and a half dollars more in design/build last year than the previous year."

Lenny DiTomaso, owner of Landscape Perceptions in Oakland, N.J., is noticing growth there, too. "People realize the market is so up and down that when it's up and they have the money, they're going to spend it," he says.



A recent Lambert's project.

TRENDS

The caveat, Griggs says, is "people are taking much longer to make decisions now. It's more of 'Let's look at this option and let's explore these materials and we're going to think about it.'"

DiTomaso sees the same scrutiny. "Usually people cut me loose and allow me to do my thing, but this year customers are watching every single thing that's being done," he says.

Things also are trending toward more water features, patios and swimming pools, sources say. Lambert's completed 15 pools in the last year; Mariani already has installed three of them in 2013. All of that growth is creating a pretty positive picture.

"It's a ways a way," Mariani says, "but I do believe it will be better than before the crash. I'm pretty positive about that."

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IRRIGATION

Sprinkler standard in the pipeline

Irrigation professional Tim Malooly shares the latest efforts to implement the first U.S. landscape irrigation sprinkler standard.

By JONATHAN KATZ

Water districts and the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), most notably through its WaterSense program, have pressured the irrigation industry to use water more efficiently. Some contractors are taking notice and action; the Irrigation Association has ramped up education, promotions and advocacy; and landscape irrigation manufacturers have responded by advancing controller technology and introducing more water-efficient sprinklers.

Still, the industry doesn't have consistent testing methods to identify and document component performance. In 2011, the International Code Council (ICC) and the Association of Agricultural & Biological Engineers formed a subcommittee to develop the first consensus standard for landscape irrigation sprinklers.

The subcommittee includes representatives from irrigation component manufacturers, water utilities, designers, installers and consumers.

Landscape Management recently spoke with the irrigation committee Chair Tim Malooly, CIC, CID, CLIA, president of Minneapolis-based Water in Motion, about the status of the standard and how it will affect contractors.



Tim Malooly

Q What type of standard is the ICC subcommittee developing?

A This applies to landscape irrigation sprinklers, including pop-up broadcast sprinklers, pop-up misting or spray sprinklers and drip and micro components. One of the first things we've focused on is testing sprinkler performance. Right now, manufacturers test their products in their own facilities with their own methods and without independent verification.

The standards also give agencies—such as local units of government or the EPA—reliable, credible information from which to build a labeling program for products.

Q So you're looking at labeling in this standard?

A Labeling is an important component of this work. We're considering how to label what's

being standardized. For instance, when you buy cereal at the grocery store, there are standard nutrition facts, such as calories, sugar and serving size. A similar label is now available for light bulbs. How that relates to landscape irrigation sprinklers is still undecided, but packaging and labeling is one component of the standards.

Q What is the status of the standard right now?

A The first public comment period took place in late winter of 2013. We're currently in the process of considering every comment and making adjustments to the draft document.

My hope was to have the standard in place by the end of this year. It's a little unknown whether we're going to hit that target because a second comment period is expected to take place in August or September. Depending on how many comments we have, we may have to go to a third public comment period. However, if we don't have to go through that, I think it's realistic to expect the standard to be completed by March 2014.

Q What type of feedback have you received so far?

A There have been comments on testing methods, parameters and how we're defining things. For example, the industry commonly refers to the application rate of an irrigation sprinkler as the "precipitation rate." But after much deliberation, the committee chose to adopt the term "application rate" instead because the term "precipitation rate" connotes something other than mechanical irrigation taking place.

Q What will this standard ultimately mean for landscape and irrigation contractors?

A It's important to the industry because the use of water in the landscape is currently receiving and will continue to receive a high level of scrutiny. People are questioning whether the water being



The landscape irrigation industry lacks universal component performance testing methods.



The International Code Council's landscape irrigation sprinkler standard may be complete early next year.

individual doesn't have to know a lot of the details of why a sprinkler system works. As a result, many irrigation systems are being installed indiscriminately and outside of best practices without consideration for water efficiency. In other words, many poor-quality lawn sprinkler systems are being installed with accompanying poor-quality maintenance and scheduling practices.

We're using a resource that's been identified as being more precious than it was in the past, and the Green Industry has been identified as one of the biggest users. There's a science behind the design, installation and scheduling of irrigation systems. If the industry doesn't take more seriously selection, design, installation, maintenance and scheduling practices, we run the risk of being put out of business. **LM**

Katz is a freelance writer based in Cleveland.

used in the landscape is being used wisely and responsibly. And the definition of "responsibly" is changing. Currently the definition of responsibly by some includes emotional decision making or social engineering positions. With the creation of industry standards—and codes that likely follow—responsible water use moves away from emotion and toward process and verifiable science.

Now more than ever practitioners must adapt to changes occurring around

them and become as technically adept as possible. The industry is changing, and the world around the industry is demanding more discipline, efficiency and rigor. If practitioners choose to do things the way they've always done them, they will ultimately be left out.

Q What are you referring to when you talk about adapting to change?

A Right now landscape sprinkler components are so reliable that an

PHOTOS: RAIN BIRD

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PVB LOCK BOX

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CLOCK BOX

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GUIDE



doesn't matter if it's with your spouse, a friend or a client."

The pillars of trust, he explains, are the eight distinct qualities that build a competitive advantage when others confidently believe in you—it's what Horsager calls "the trust edge."

These pillars include: consistency, clarity, compassion, character, contribution, competence, connection and commitment. Mastering the pillars and gaining trust isn't easy, because trust is always a risk, he said. Remember: "It's the little things done consistently that make the biggest difference."

Being a great employer

One well attended Symposium session was "Why Become a Great Employer?"—a talk given by Mike Rorie, CEO of GIS Dynamics and former CEO of Cincinnati-based GroundMasters, which he sold to Brickman in 2006.

At its peak, GroundMasters had 550 employees at eight locations. Becoming the landscape employer of choice in his market was a key to the company's success, Rorie said.

The goal for any Green Industry company that wants to grow should be to become the place where people want to work—where competitors' employees approach you and ask if there's a place for them.

"If your name comes up as one of the best places to

Snow and ice management professionals studied up in June and July at several industry educational events. **BY MARISA PALMIERI**

WHEN IT HEATS up outside, savvy snow management professionals don't neglect their winter work—they hit the books for next season.

This summer provided several educational opportunities, including the Snow & Ice Management Association's (SIMA's) Annual Snow & Ice Symposium, held June 20-22 in Minneapolis, and Sno-Motion, a seminar and roundtable event hosted by Pro-Motion Consulting in Cleveland, July 11-12.

It's about trust

Snow & Ice Symposium keynote speaker David Horsager presented "The Trust Edge: 4 Keys to Create, Build and Enjoy Lasting Momentum."

Why should snow and ice profes-

sionals care about a "soft" topic like trust? Consider the following statistics from the 2009 Edelman Trust Barometer. When people trust a company:

- > 91 percent chose to buy from it;
- > 76 percent recommend it to a friend;
- > 55 percent will pay a premium; and
- > 42 percent share positive experiences online.

"For the trusted brand, people pay more, come back and tell others," Horsager said. "From the trusted salesperson, people buy. The trusted leader is followed. A lack of trust is your biggest expense, and it



David Horsager was the keynote speaker for the Snow & Ice Symposium.

work, you've got a competitive edge," he said.

So, how do you get there? Here are a few tips from Rorie.

➤ Share the company vision. It's important to employees to have a road map of the

organization's goals and values to create buy-in. Remember, employee satisfaction equals customer loyalty. "People want to do business with employees who look like they love what they're doing," he said.



SIMA's Snow & Ice Trade Show was held in Minneapolis in June.

➤ Give your employees great systems.

These may include software (financial, sales, management, measurement, etc.), checklists, manuals and processes with documentation. "Lack of systems causes confusion, frustration and chaos," Rorie said. "Employees feel like they're not in control. It's your job to produce a solution so that doesn't happen."

➤ Work hard to retain the proper talent. When companies achieve a certain level of talent within the organization, senior managers and key team members become "gatekeepers"—wanting to have a say about who gets into the company, he said.

➤ Recognize, reward and replace. "It's vital to recognize those who are exceeding expectations by improving the fastest or taking on more responsibility," Rorie said, adding it's important to follow up that recognition with rewards those employees value. Here are a few ideas:

- Offer personal recognition in front of peers;
- Send home a thank-you card; or
- Give them a perk or financial incentive such as a car wash, lunch, paid day off or 50-cent raise.

Finally, if managers or other employees say there's someone on the team who doesn't belong, listen to them. "There should be no sacred cows," Rorie said. "Great employees appreciate when you hold everyone accountable. The best form of praise you can offer other team members is to replace the under performers."

Objects in motion

Attendees at Sno-Motion were taken back to physics class by host Phil Harwood when he shared: "An object

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at rest will stay at rest and an object in motion will not change its velocity unless an external force acts upon it. You are the force, if you take action!"

With that, Harwood, CEO of Pro-

Motion Consulting, emphasized the interactive slant of the event, which featured product- and technology-focused sessions, including speakers and roundtable talks and group presentations. The format spurred much discussion.

Attendees shared many good ideas during the event. Here are just a few:

▶ **Test run.** When Harwood ran a snow and ice management firm, the company would do a "fire drill" before the season's first true snowfall. When there was a dusting of snow, the company would bring all staff in, guarantee them four hours on the clock to make it worth their while and run them through all the procedures.



Sno-Motion attendees participated in roundtable talks.

▶ **Bonus round.** To encourage employee retention and timeliness, Brian Vanhengstum of DICAM Landscaping in Binbrook, Ontario, shared that his company has had success offering a \$2 per hour bonus for all hours worked at the end of the season to employees with 100 percent prompt attendance.

▶ **Box it in.** Neal Glatt, account executive at Case Snow Management in Attleboro Falls, Mass., said his company uses box trucks for sidewalk crews. They can hold and keep dry all of the necessary materials and tools, including brooms, blowers, shovels, etc. "That truck can take on sidewalks for any account," he said.

▶ **Call me, maybe.** Bruce Vander Vennen from Jack's Lawn Service & Snowplowing in Bryon Center, Mich., shared his tactic for keeping crew members informed during snow events: a text and voice broadcasting service called Call-Em-All. The service also accepts replies, which he receives via email. **LM**

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