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FROM THE LM BLOG

» landscapemanagement.blogspot.com

FD2B Talk Radio Insight of the Night

As part of a new partnership between *Landscape Management* and FD2B Talk Radio, we post an "Insight of the Night" every Thursday from the previous night's radio show. FD2B Talk Radio is a Green Industry radio show that broadcasts live every Wednesday at 7 p.m. Eastern. Its host and founder is *LM* columnist Jody Shilan, who's also the editor and founder of *FromDesign2Build.com*. Here are a few gems from the show.

» One way to retain employees is by providing them education and training. Some owners and managers fear that helping their employees better themselves and develop valuable skills is expensive—and there's no

guarantee that employees won't leave. That's true, but consider the alternative: Not educating or training employees and having them stay.

—*Jack Ferrell, Green Industry recruiter, Florasearch, Sanford, Fla.*

» Instead of doing a landscape design presentation in person as most contractors do, consider scheduling an appointment with the homeowners using GoToMeeting and conducting an online presentation to review the drawings. Not only does this save travel time, but you can "meet" with both the husband and wife even if they're at two different locations. Another big benefit is scheduling meetings during regular business hours and not at night or on the weekends.

—*Brad Groff, co-owner of River Valley Landscape and Pools, Wrightsville, Pa.*

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@fieldstonels: @FieldstoneLS Check out the article by @LandscapeMgmt t.co/JXRmV1ot

@chadkellogg: Feel somewhat important to know these 3! Well done @robpalmerwp @ShaunCanary @keithgutierrez! Thanks @LandscapeMgmt! t.co/D7JZXX7s

WEB EXTRA »

Need guidance on creating your set of company values? Check out The Dwyer Group's Code of Values to get started.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

MARISA PALMIERI EDITOR

Contact Marisa at 216/706-3764 or via email at mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net.

Let this be the year...

... the terms “fiscal cliff,” “mini cliffs” and “debt ceiling” are eliminated from our vernacular thanks to sensible solutions in Congress that include spending cuts and not merely raising taxes on job creators. And let’s hope it happens even before this magazine hits your desk.

... the winter *makes* rather than *breaks* the year for professionals on the “white” side of the Green Industry. C’mon, Old Man Winter. Please deliver enough snow to keep crews working until spring.

... no workers die or are injured on the job due to preventable safety infractions like a lack of training or personal protective equipment or poorly maintained vehicles and equipment.

... more firms decide to up the ante with companywide charitable acts or contributions, which could motivate others to “pay it forward.” (Need inspiration? See page 10 to learn about the impressive impact Harrisburg, Pa.-based Utopian Landscapes is having.)

...of comprehensive immigration reform. Congress is expected to take up the topic early this year, but *taking it up* isn’t enough. There must be a solution. As the American Nursery & Landscape Association’s Craig Regelbrugge said in a blog post last month, “Fixes to America’s broken immigration system must include future worker programs that actually

function, as well as solutions for current, experienced immigrant workers in the industry. Stronger enforcement will be part of the package, so the reforms have to work.”

... state and local officials consider all stakeholders—and science—before haphazardly implementing noise ordinances, irrigation restrictions, fertilizer regulations or other rules that could hamper business owners. (If you’re experiencing these challenges, see how Florida professionals have dealt with fertilizer ordinances on page 34.)

... the Grass Roots exhibit at the U.S. National Arboretum gets built, putting a positive, research-based face on the turf industry.

...students—and their parents—see the Green Industry as a legitimate career path with many educational choices to pursue.

... we quit having to modify so many statements we make with the phrase “in this economy” and the impacts of The Great Recession—joblessness, a depressed housing market and others—no longer plague our P&Ls.

... you meet the goals you’ve laid out for yourself and your company, whether they’re in your long-range plan, scrawled on a cocktail napkin or tucked away in your mind.

Here’s to a great 2013!

Landscape Management

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NEWS+VIEWS

GREEN INDUSTRY EVENTS, TRENDS AND TIPS

For even more Lawn Care Forum coverage, see page 34 for five lessons you can learn from Florida's fertilizer restriction climate.

Face to face



Swingle Lawn, Tree & Landscape Care's Tom Lynch meets with Direct Solutions representatives at the Lawn Care Forum.

Landscape Management's inaugural Lawn Care Forum provided attendees with excellent networking and educational opportunities. **BY MARISA PALMIERI**

There's a first time for everything, and in December *Landscape Management* debuted a new concept in the Green Industry: the Lawn Care Forum.

This invite-only event takes a three-pronged approach to delivering value for both attendees and sponsors: networking, education and one-on-one supplier meetings.

So, was this first-of-its-kind meeting a success? Take it from attendee Matt Owens, vice president of landscape operations for Potomac Garden Center in Urbana, Md.

"There was a relaxed atmosphere throughout the entire three-day event that allowed me to create and strengthen relationships with the sponsors and other leaders in the industry from around the country," Owens said. "I encourage others to attend this event in the future to experience the same benefits I gained."

The schedule slated golf and a formal dinner on day one. On day two, one-on-one sponsor meetings were interspersed with meals and speakers, followed by a casual barbecue dinner. The event wrapped up with a half day of speakers and sponsor meetings on day three.

RISE-ing above

Karen Reardon from Responsible Industry for a Sound Environment (RISE) keynoted the opening night dinner, addressing "Lawn Care Regulations: Emerging Threats & Issues."

Public opinion research RISE has conducted shows that antipesticide activists' messages are not necessarily reflective of registered voters' opinions or those of the public as a whole, Reardon said, noting the activists often have the loudest voices in their communities.

At the same time, RISE's conversations with policymakers reveal that the industry doesn't interact with them unless they have something to gripe about, so there's a need to be proactive, Reardon said.

She detailed RISE's move to form a nationwide "grassroots network" five years ago to bring together profession-

continued on page 8



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Teeing off at the Lawn Care Forum: LM's Pat Roberts, Swingle's Tom Lynch, Potomac Garden Center's Matt Owens and LM's Craig MacGregor.



continued from page 6

als on the ground to provide support and a voice for the industry in places where pesticides and fertilizers are under attack.

"We're still seeing a lot of local bans. We need another voice to be in the conversation," she said, referring to the need for industry representation to combat activists' claims. RISE's grassroots network has engaged 5,000 people so far, with an aggressive goal to add another 5,000 per year.

What's coming down the pike? A perennial hot spot on the map is New England, where it's easy for ideas and laws to "go back and forth across state lines, good or bad." In some states, "pre-emption will be on the table," she said, referring to state legislation that pre-empts local governments from enacting stricter fertilizer restrictions. She also said to look for attacks on nitrogen to rise. Phosphorous has been the nutrient on the chopping block for the past few years, but many states are not meeting their Clean Water Act regulations and may look to restrict phosphorous inputs. Even though lawn care is estimated to be plus or minus 1 percent



RISE's
Karen
Reardon

of the impact on nonpoint source pollution, it's perceived by lawmakers to be low-hanging fruit and a better option than spending thousands of dollars to treat waterways.

Rather than be defensive in the face of state and local regulations, Reardon encouraged lawn care professionals to "show up in a powerful way" to talk about positive messages, such as their impacts in the community and integrated pest management.

"The conversation with lawmakers should be much more like one you'd have with a customer or prospect—you want to sell them on your perspective," she said.

Content is king

Chris Heiler, founder of Green Industry inbound marketing firm Landscape



Landscape
Leadership's
Chris Heiler

Leadership, spoke on the second day, waking up attendees with questions about their websites during his talk, "How to Use Inbound Marketing to Convert Website Traffic into Qualified Leads and Customers."

Seventy-five percent to 90 percent of people visiting your website are not ready to buy—they're in fact-finding mode, Heiler said, adding most companies don't know how to turn a visitor in fact-finding mode into a qualified lead. Most sites appeal to the 10 percent to 25 percent of people who are ready to buy right now by providing a phone number and a form for a free estimate or consultation.

"They're ignoring everyone else who's researching," he said. So, how do you turn those in the middle of the buying process into a lead? It starts with relevant content, Heiler said, such as informative blog posts or downloadable guides, like a regional lawn care calendar or a tip sheet for watering during a drought. Providing such informative content positions your company as an expert in the field and keeps you top of mind when they get closer to the buying stage, he said.

"Content is the meat of your cheeseburger," he said, noting that search is the bun and social media is the cheese. "To have a really good cheeseburger, you need to have all three."

LAWN CARE FORUM > BY THE NUMBERS

1 The Lawn Care Forum is the industry's *only* event that pairs one-on-one supplier meetings with networking and educational offerings.

28 Number of attendees, comprising leading lawn care operators from around the country.

30 minutes Length of prearranged one-on-one meetings between suppliers and attendees.

3 Number of impressive industry speakers: RISE's Director of Communications Karen Reardon; Chris Heiler, president of Landscape Leadership, an inbound marketing firm; and Don Rainey, statewide coordinator for the Florida-Friendly Landscaping Program's Green Industry Best Management Practices.

1 ft. 1 in. Winning "closest to the pin" score during the golf tournament, made by William Iddings, co-owner of Advantage Green Lawn & Pest Solutions, Summerfield, Fla.

5 Sponsors for this year's event: Dow AgroSciences, Direct Solutions, FMC, PermaGreen and Lebanon Turf

WANT TO ATTEND NEXT YEAR?

To be put on the list of potential attendees for next year's Lawn Care Forum, contact LM Editor Marisa Palmieri at mpalmieri@northcoastmedia.net, and we'll notify you when it's time to apply.

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A ripple effect

One neighbor's goodwill has led to much greater giving. BY CASEY PAYTON

In 2009, a new client asked Utopian Landscapes in Harrisburg, Pa., to put together a holiday lighting proposal for a struggling neighbor's home. That act of goodwill created a ripple effect that led to the creation of a grant program serving many others in need. Today that sentiment has spread even farther.

"When he asked us to put together some prices for his neighbor, we figured he'd do a small \$200 or \$300

job," says Utopian President Nikos Floros Phelps. "But he came back and said, 'Do all of it,' which worked out to almost \$2,000. We realized that if our client could do something so generous, as a business we owed it to our community to find ways that we could give back."

Today, the Donald Phelps Christmas Grant, named after Phelps' late grandfather, allows members of the community to nominate deserving individuals for complimentary holiday lighting.

Of the families the grant has served since its inception, one story in particular stands out: that of a woman who suffers from multiple sclerosis and her daughter, both of whom were attacked by a stray dog. Due to complications from the attack, the woman's hospital expenses were astronomical. The family was nominated for and received the holiday lighting grant. When Phelps delivered the good news, the woman felt there were others who were more deserving.

"She is always giving back to others," says Phelps. "In fact, when another client of mine found out about her story, he



During PLANET's Day of Service in 2011, Utopian helped build an outdoor classroom at a Harrisburg, Pa., school.

gave me an enormous jar of change and bills—something he called his 'Christmas jar.' ... But when the woman received the money—which might have been \$1,000—she donated half of that to a local food bank because she felt that there were people who were in even greater need than her."

It's stories like these that have inspired Phelps to create other giving opportunities. The Yanniss Floros Landscaping Grant, named for Phelps' late uncle, donates landscape maintenance services to a family in need, and the Dina Tourli Grant, named for Phelps' late, civic-minded aunt, is a huge community-based project done every few years.

Phelps and his crew also participate in Christmas Decor's Decorated Family Program, donating holiday lighting for families of deployed service members.

Phelps says that when he first started the charity work he wondered whether his

crew members would be on board. "We weren't sure how they would respond to it," he recalls. "But it was obvious they embraced the idea as much as we did."

"It's a great feeling you get when you can help someone who is struggling in life," says Utopian landscape foreman Ryan Danner. "To be able to see a smile on their face when they are going through hardships is phenomenal. It has given me a great sense of pride in myself and the company to be able to help those in need."

Phelps says he's already seen some of the positive effects of the goodwill he's spread—which all started from one neighbor wanting to help a fellow neighbor. He hopes that even more people will be inspired. "Could you imagine how much could get done in a community if every company did just one volunteer effort?" muses Phelps. "We think that would be pretty amazing." LMI

AT A GLANCE

Company: Utopian Landscapes

Headquarters: Harrisburg, Pa.

President: Nikos Phelps

SELECT PROJECT LISTING:

▶ **Utopian Grant Program**—three grants provide landscape services to those in need

▶ **Decorated Family Program**—as a franchisee of Christmas Decor, provides holiday decorating for the families of deployed service members

▶ **ABC's Extreme Makeover: Home Edition**—served as co-lead for the Etters, Pa., project in 2011

▶ **PLANET Day of Service**—conducts an annual, one-day cleanup or installation for a school, park or family

▶ **PLANET Renewal & Remembrance**—participates in Arlington National Cemetery service project

Landscape Management is the media sponsor of the Professional Landcare Network's (PLANET) Community Stewardship Award. We'll feature each of the program's six winners January through June. For more information, visit landcarenetwork.org/awards/communityaward.